A TURNPIKE LADY

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A Turnpike Lady

Beartown, Vermont, 1768-1796

BY

SARAH N. CLEGHORN

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To

J. O. H. AND J. D. C.

WITH PANSIES AND WITH ROSEMARY

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Polkes Described	1
II.	Tall Talk at the Saphouse	7
III.	The Day of the Battle of Bennington	18
IV.	Eliza's Illness—The Green Silk	34
V.	The Arrival of the Lucys—Eliza Goes to Jamaica	57
VI.	Eliza Sulks	74
VII.	Alpheus and Maryette—The Black Saturday	90
VIII.	Gateways of the Enchanted Country	108
IX.	Flavia Obeys Her Mother	118
X.	Honours and Emoluments	131
XI.	The Proud Summer Begins	140
XII.	Advice from Marm and Mrs. Darby	151
XIII.	Driving to Westminster	165
XIV.	The Cradle in the Woodhouse Chamber	178

CHAPTER PAGE

XV. Eliza's Visit 193

XVI. The Proud Summer Ends 213

XVII. The Little Innocent 223

XVIII. Morning, Afternoon, and Evening at the House on the North Turnpike . . 239

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CHAPTER I

The Polkes Described

Alexis, here she walked: among these pines.

IN the amphitheatre between Red and Bald Mountains (peaks of eastern Vermont) are the remains of the tollgate hamlet of Beartown, which flourished there four generations ago. From the valley Beartown looks no bigger than a child's necklace of beans or spools, lost in the mountain hollow. But this brief row of log and clapboarded houses then sheltered large families of children, cheerful huskings, spellings, paring bees, and kitchen fiddlings; and a long parade walked on Sundays to the church, where the Prayer-Book was read to a congregation of loyalists by the toothless Mr. Greenpiece.

The tollgate was kept by James Darby, who,

with his brother-in-law Richard Polke, drilled and led away the Beartown Whig-Biters. Mr. Darby and Mr. Polke had married sisters of some wealth, and their houses were the most pretentious in the town—clapboarded with wide boards, and painted yellow and white. The Polkes had a few scrawny poplars in front, which they valued more than all the fine maples round their barn. Their house, though it looked large among its neighbours, would not have been large enough for the eleven children, if they had all been children at once. But the eldest were married and gone away before the youngest were born; and there was a great gulf in the middle of the family, where several little boys and girls had died in quick succession of chin-cough and spinal disease. Naomi and her next sister Eliza could only remember one of these shadowy lost ones—their poor little brother David, whose head was drawn sidewise, and who wore a cruel brace made of a coat-hook.

Eliza was seven years old, and Naomi was three, when Saul, the youngest child, was born. Naomi remembered well her little brother's baptism, on a raw, lowering November afternoon. The church had not been aired, and struck a fatal chill to Mrs. Polke's chest. It was thought that the peevish, ailing baby could not long survive his christening; but he grew to be a stout boy, while his mother went into a slow consumption. Naomi could always recall her mother in those last years, as she used to sit in a deep chintz chair, her bony knees poking up through her petticoats—with hollow grey eyes looking over the rim of Bald Mountain toward her early home.

Of the eleven children who had been born to Mr. Polke, but four now remained in the house behind the poplars. An aunt of their mother's came up from Charlotte County to take care of them. Marm Patridge, as she was called, was a kind, fat, shrewd old woman, who sewed and

scrubbed and contrived with all her heart and strength for those whom she called her children by adoption and grace. Titus, the eldest, was a dark, lank, stooping, silent youth of fifteen. Eliza was a delicate child of eleven. She had the blue eyes, blue-black hair, and delicate complexion of the Polkes—Irish colouring, with which she showed a mercurial Irish temperament. Her loose frocks hung off her bottle-sloping shoulders. When she cast down her wistful eyes, a faint pearl shadow fell from her lashes, painting her cheek beautifully wan.

Naomi alone of all the children had her mother's grey eyes. Her hair was reddish, her skin a freckled amber. She was short and stocky; her legs, she thought, were as powerful as a young moose's, to spring up the steep rocky paths. She was a staid, obedient, blunt, truthful child. Her father called her best trait by its prettiest name when he said sometimes,

"Little Naomye's a sisterly child."

She was different from all her brothers and sisters in one trait, a deep absent-mindedness. She was always being told to "come down out of the clouds"; for many things threw her into fits of musing, such as the sound of singing, or of flowing waters, the woods in autumn, or the Psalter in church.

Little Saul, called Budsey, was already a venturesome, vagrant little boy, whose hands were always covered with warts, scratches, and cuts. He had soon outgrown his early delicacy, and his cheeks were so red that strangers thought he had a fever. Before he was out of petticoats he had acquired a tall opinion of himself. His great-aunt would trudge away, on her gouty limbs, to fetch his playthings: and Naomi would run across the garret barefoot, on a cold snowy morning, to bring an apple for him to eat in his trucklebed. She thought no child had ever loved another as she loved little Budsey.

Such was the family of whom Marm Patridge

used to philosophise, through the gaps in her teeth.

"Theshe childern air quite a care to me; but who elshe, saysh I, be they to look to? for the Patridgesh air all dead but me; I'm the only one to have my shroud turn yallow with age."

While the Polke children were picking blueberries, or wading in the pools of Roaring Branch, the clouds of war were rolling up toward their hollow. Awaking before daylight one morning, Naomi saw lanterns moving in the woods about Westminster, the village in the valley, where two sheriffs were being given the "beach seal" on their naked backs. The west loopholes of the garret looked down, across a broad landscape, to the Courthouse itself, with its high fenced roof, in the middle of Westminster Street.

CHAPTER II

Tall Talk at the Sapbouse

They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The courts where Jamshyd gloried and drank deep.

NAOMI'S young cousin Debbe Darby came up one melting March afternoon to borrow buckets. The sap was running on Red Mountain. Debbe had on her cowhide boots, ready to plunge through the spongy snow and reeking damp woods, to the saphouse. Naomi snatched her padded bonnet and ran out to join her. When the sap ran, the spring had begun. A sharp wind blew down from the snowy caves above, but the little girls could see a plough glisten in the brown fields of Westminster far below. Delicate young-ladified Eliza stood at the window peering out through the pane of greased paper at the tomboys, as they ran along

the woods looking for the fringed leaves of the squirrel corn, and reddish trefoil of the wind-flower.

As they passed the tollgate house, they saw Debbe's sister Pleiades sitting at the keeping-room window, with her hands clasped round her knees, idly looking down at the nine waterbars and the fork of the Westminster road.

"What ails Pleiades?" inquired Naomi. "Is she sick?"

"Sick? no. She's as stout's hickory."

"Why hain't she up at the saphouse then?"

"Oh, she likes to set at hum and moon about her beau."

"What's a beau?" asked little Naomi.

"Hain't you ever heared of beaus, you ignorant young one?"

"No, sir, I hain't. What be they? a kind of bunnit?"

"Te-hee! no, you ignorant child. A beau's a young man that goes a-visitin' Wednesdays and Sabbies, and wears his best wescat, and greases his hair."

"Oh!"

"Pleiades has catched William French for her beau. He comes the hull way up from Brattleboro to see her; but he hain't be'n here since Wednesday evening. He missed his Sabby. Hain't you ever seen William French's nag hitched to our gate?"

"What, that humly piebald?"

"Don't you call my sister's beau's nag a humly piebald, Naomye Polke, or I'll saouse your face in the hen's pail!"

"You hain't stout enough to do so."

"Hain't, hey? Oh, looky, Naomye, how fast the spouts drip!"

The little girls were springing up the steep path. Already they could smell the boiling sap, and could hear their fathers talking over

the kettle. They heard Mr. Polke's loud imaginative talk, and Mr. Darby's cackling laughter.

"I tell ye," Mr. Polke was saying to his brother-in-law, "there's very tall talk in Westminster in these days. Peleg Sunderland has be'n over the mountain, and they say he's fetched back another pair of haounds."

"To hunt the Beartown Tories, hey?" inquired Mr. Darby derisively.

"Captin Hiel Hawley says he heared a very ribble song as he rid past the tavern in Westminster a fortnit ago."

"What was it, hey? 'Town by Town'?"

"No, sir, that wan't the song."

"What was it, then?"

"It was this new one, Hanky or Panky Doodle, I believe they call it. Hawley larnt me one verse, but I've forgot it. It was something of this nature;" and Mr. Polke, in his fine trolling voice, tried to sing

"There sits a cock on Windsor walls,
If we could git him handy,
We'd pull his tail and whiskers aout—
Hank-a-doodle dandy.

It's a very ribble song."

Mr. Darby inquired in a hushed voice,

"Who d'ye think was meant by the cock, Richard?"

"Why, James, the king was meant."

"Then we better shine up our bills and blades, Richard! We better meet together and drill ourselves into a company. Parliament should know of such doin's!"

"Yes, by hen! The king should know of it!" cried Mr. Darby. "What would be thought in London if the truth was knowed there about these goin's-on in Westminster, and Jamaiky, and Bennin'ton? What if Peleg Sunderland was fetched up before Parliament for sicking his haounds on the Tories of Beartown, hey?"

"They've got so uppish in Westminster, they

vaow the king's Court hain't to set at all in their town," said Mr. Darby.

"That's a good one!" said Mr. Polke mirthfully.

"It'll be a long while, I guess, before the Court doos set to Westminster." The speaker was a young man in hunting clothes, who had sat, until now, silent, in the corner of the saphouse.

"I forgot you was there, Tite," said Mr. Darby. "You hain't spoke for an hour."

"He hain't spoke," said Mr. Polke, "since he got hum from Westminster this forenoon."

Titus Polke shifted his long legs and relapsed into thought again. Naomi saw him lick his lips.

"What ails Titey?" she muttered to herself.

"I guess," said Mr. Darby, "the Court 'll set when the day comes."

"The day has come," said Titus, "but the Court hain't setting yit."

"Oh, wal, there may be some little delay. The

Whigs at Westminster air gitting to be the ringleaders of this hull trouble all over the Grants. The canker of rebellion is gathering in this valley. If I was asked, I should say—Cut it aout with sabres! Burn it aout with gunpaowder!"

"There was sabres and guns a-cutting and a-burning in Westminster yistaday," said Titus.

"What say?" cried his father and uncle.

"I say there was gunnin' round the Courthouse in Westminster last night, and two good fellows was shot——"

"What say? What say?"

"William French was shot in the head, and Dan'l Houghton in the belly. French is dead," said Titus in a heavy voice.

"William French!" whispered Naomi to Debbe. "Your sister's beau!"

Mr. Polke and Mr. Darby had sunk back in their chairs. Mr. Polke was very pale. Titus

got up and walked to the doorway, where he stood looking out at the dripping trees, and chipmunk tracks in the snow.

"I guess," he said suddenly, "I'll go with the liberty party now, if I git hanged for it, as most likely I shall."

Then he turned round, and saw his father's head hanging down on his breast.

"Father! if you had seen his maouth, poor French's maouth, all blubbered and bloody, and heared poor Houghton, how he groaned! They stepped on a stun as they was carryin' him—his belly was tore almost in two."

"Stop—stop tellin' of it!" cried Mr. Darby, stopping his ears.

"Father, I hain't forgot how praoud we all be, to think we're loyal, down to second cousins; and that's why," said Titus, "I hain't turned long before."

Mr. Polke did not speak, but Mr. Darby asked coldly:

"What harm have the king's people ever done to you or any of your kin, Titus Polke?"

"Why, uncle, I'll tell ye what they've done. They've pestered and bullied the hull of Cumberland Caounty: and naow they've killed two lunkin' great fellows that I'd give my half of the gun if I'd never seen 'em lyin' there . . . poor French, his maouth. . . . I'm sick, I guess." His cheeks did look mottled and purplish. The sap boiled over the monstrous kettle, and no one saw it. Naomi and Debbe let their cups fall, and the half-grained sugar ran over their aprons.

"Be I dreaming, James," asked Mr. Polke, "or is my son a t-t-t-turnco't?"

"No, Richard, you hain't dreamin'. Your son is a snivellin' tail-turner. Spew him aout—let him go in a ragged shirt to the Westminster Mob —let 'em all be shot to hell together!"

"Father can speak for himself, uncle——"

"Be still, turncoat! Have him gether his clothes in a bundle, Richard. Send him down to

Westminster—let the king's troops shoot him through the back."

The little girls screamed faintly, and put their fingers in their ears.

Mr. Polke said, "You hain't any son of your own, James, that you speak so to mine."

"God be thanked for that," said Mr. Darby grimly.

"Oh, father, don't hear to such talk!" cried little Naomi, letting go her cousin's hand and running out of her corner. She ran to her father, and stood between his knees, looking fiercely at her uncle Darby; a feverish colour burning up her pale freckles, and her hands clenched until the knuckles were white.

"Shame on Uncle Darby!" she cried.

"Box that child's ears, Richard!"

But Mr. Polke did not hear. He saw the delicate hollow in his little girl's cheek, and her grey eyes like her mother's; and all that he could say to Mr. Darby was:

"What would his m—mother think, James, if I was to do as you say? Come, Naomye, climb up on father's knee. Hush—your brother Tite hain't goin' away from home."

None of them all thought then of poor Pleiades, whose lover was lying, with his mouth "all blubbered and bloody," on the floor of the Courthouse at Westminster.

CHAPTER III

The Day of the Battle of Bennington

The forest cracked, the waters curled,
The cattle huddled on the lea.

THERE was a swamp in a deep hollow behind the tollgate, filled with matted grass, brown lilies, and adders' nests. This became the parade-ground of the Beartown Whig-Biters, when Mr. Darby in his Italian boots, and Mr. Polke in his tight Peninsular uniform, drilled them in the summer evenings of 1777. The talk was taller than ever in these days, between the fierce villages of loyal Beartown and rebellious Westminster. The Biters of Beartown were a miscellaneous company, and their weapons were a museum of ancient and modern arms. Bills once carried by London apprentices in Tudor riots were there, with cutlasses, pistols of Portugal, and even a tomahawk, which Mr. Greenpiece had

dug up in his sauce garden. The children of Beartown perched in the surrounding trees to watch the drills. Naomi, who was nine years old in May, was thought too much of a young lady to shin up pine trees any more—she and Debbe Darby must carry their crickets across pasture to the swamp, and sit and knit as they watched their townsmen drill.

Eliza, that delicate house plant, could not come to the drills. She was not able to breathe the fresh air except through a fine strainer of a veil. The tender creature, with her pale pleasure-craving face and asking eyes, must sit all day in a baking temperature, while she executed her fancies in needlework. She had a secret piece of work which she would fold away in haste when Captain Polke, with Budsey and Naomi hanging on his yellow-faced tails, came up the pike.

Naomi was watching the drill, on an afternoon in middle August, when the Biters were swagger-

ing to and fro across the swamp, swelling out their stomachs, and exchanging tall brags and boasts among themselves. Budsey followed them on his short legs, imitating every motion of their gait—a baby Biter. Debbe Darby was there, and so was Marm Patridge, who kept a sharp eye on the little girls' knitting; every now and then interrupting the Captains' orders to call out:

"Pick up that loop you've dropped there, Naomye Polke!" or

"It'sh time you wash narrowin' that shock, Deb Darby!"

"I wish the Biters could have be'n in Bostown a couple of years ago," said Mr. Greenpiece admiringly, "to snip this rebellion in the bud."

"It was decreed otherwise," said Mr. Darby. "The raskills was to have rope enough to hang themselves."

"Captin Hiel Hawley says," put in Mr. Polke,

"that the hull rebellion has petered aout, and Burgoyne wun't hardly git here in time to set foot on the tail of it. Washin'ton is as good as catched. He can't get out of York with a hull hide."

"There's a good many don't sleep very well in Westminster these nights, I warrant," said Mr. Byjam darkly.

"Where's Sunderland, hey? Where's his haounds? Why don't he come and ketch us?" cried Mr. Darby, slapping his leg. But suddenly he pricked up his ears.

"What—what's that?" he exclaimed.

"Look ye there!" cried Mr. Polke.

A frantic creature in pale breeches, with pale streaming hair, came fleeing through the woods. His coat tails blew out behind, and his stick-like legs hurled him forward like a two-spoked wheel among the brambles and loose rocks of the Red woods.

"It's Henry Tibbald!" cried little Naomi in

great anxiety, jumping up from her cricket. "Leg it, Henry! Leg it faster!"

"Sunderland's haounds!" cried several voices in alarm. "We better all let out for hum." Some of the Biters shinned up trees, others cocked their guns with trembling fingers.

The desperate boy fell panting on the wet matted grass, and looked about for the beast that had been chasing him. No creature was in view but a brown setter, which now came nosing in a friendly manner at his knees.

"Why, it's our old Snooper!" cried Mr. Polke.

He whistled to the dog.

"What made ye run away from old Snooper, hey?"

"Why," said the youth, "Pleiades Darby called out to me as I was walkin' up the pike—she put her head out the winder, and told me to run as quick as I could—the haounds was after me; so I legged it."

"Haw, haw!" laughed the Biters.

"Te-hee!" cackled the children in the tree-tops. "Hen Tibbald put aout up Bald Mount'in, to git away from Mr. Polke's old Snooper."

"You needn't to laugh at Hen," cried Naomi, stamping her foot. "Budsey Polke, don't you titter again! Any of you would have runned as fast as he did, if Pleiades had told you the same tale."

Henry Tibbald gave his defender a grateful look.

"W-wal," said he, "I've fuf-fetched something here that hain't a tut-titterin' matter." He pulled a paper out of his bosom and gave it to Mr. Polke. Mr. Polke read, and passed it in haste to Mr. Darby. In another moment the Biters were all in an uproar, the young boys shouting and throwing their bills and hats into the air, the older men slapping each other on the back; and Marm Patridge had climbed on the tipping-stone, and was trying to cut a pigeon wing.

Naomi ran to her father, and pulled at his coat.

"Who's a-twitchin' my tails?"

"It's me, father. What's befallen? What ails ye all?"

"What ails us, hey?" Mr. Polke swung his little daughter to his shoulder. "Why, Naomye, this is a day of glory for Beartown. We've got our marchin' orders from Captin Hiel Hawley."

"Oh, father! Where? When? How you goin'?"

"Afoot."

"Oh, father; where?"

"Bennin'ton way."

"Oh, no, please, father! I don't want you should go there. I had a bad dream last night. I dreamt of a mouse catched in a tail-trap—that's a very bad sign. Father! He's walked away and left me jawing. I'd give my husk-dolly's bunnit if I could keep father to hum," she muttered sadly as she sat down by Debbe Darby again.

But Debbe was not listening. Her ear was turned to the forest, whence she could hear a faint sound of singing. It was a voice she knew, and she could hear the Whiggish tune,

"Town by town, town by town,
Allen's tall Green Mountain Boys
Air a-piling down."

"Hark," said Debbe, "to my sister Pleiades singin' in the woods!"

"What makes her do so?"

"I can't tell ye. She's got some curious ways of late. She's all the while mumblin' to herself, and I tell ye, Naomye, sometimes——"

"You speak so low I can't hear ye, Deb."

"Sometimes I'm most afeared of her! my own sister! hain't it ter'ble?"

Naomi felt herself shaking, her cousin looked so strangely at her.

The dusk was already falling from the high peaks behind which the sun went down at five o'clock. Mr. Polke called his two children to go

home. Rather solemnly they walked up the dusty pike. The ferns along the roadside were dry and withered by the drought, but a welcome dampness began at sundown to exhale from the woods. As they turned into their own gate, young Eliza, with a bright red spot under each eye, appeared at the window. She beckoned to them; and as soon as they entered, she ran to her father and shook out her secret needlework—a tiny British flag.

"There, father—that's for the Biters to carry. I made it out of an old red petticoat, and an old chimee, and the little blue babe's dress we've all worn in turn."

"You're a good girl, Elizy, to think of it. Beautiful—beautiful fine stitches you've set into it. But you mustn't set and sew too much. That's what makes you despise your victuals, we think."

"I hain't had the stitch in my side in most a week, father."

"Wal—but you look peakèd to-night, I think. Air you well?—hain't you feverish?"

"No, father,—but I thought I had the janders coming on this forenoon, for Pleiades was here to set and sew with me, and she stared so at me, I thought I must be turning yallow. I don't know what's come over Pleiades since her beau was killed. She's got some very strange ways. She looks, and stares, and creeps like a cat——"

"Oh, tut, tut, tut, my dear, you must get rid of such notions. Marm better take away your needle and push ye out of doors."

Eliza began to cry, partly at her father's anxious tone, and partly from a natural longing, not quite smothered, to run out freely, like little Naomi, into that same "raw" air. Her father took her on his knee. He patted her head, and smoothed her thin black hair back from her lovely brows. It was sweeter than honey in the honeycomb, she thought, to have him do so. Little Budsey whispered to Naomi,

"Sister cries to git father to comfort her."

"Wal, I would too," said Naomi.

It was a solemn supper, and a solemn walk down the familiar cross-cut to the pasture bars. No mockery was heard from Marm Patridge's sharp tongue to-night. There were a great many shooting stars in the August skies. Naomi saw one shooting westward, as if it were pointing the way to Bennington.

"Good-bye, childern!" their father called. "We'll bring the raskills' provender home to feed the bob-tailed colt. I wish we'd had aour summons a month ago; for this is the tail end of the war."

Naomi darted after her father and pressed a small parcel into his coat pocket.

"Here! hi! what you up to, Naomye?"

"Father, I thought if you went over Bennin'ton way, p'haps you'd see Titey; and I could send him that passel——"

"What's in it, hey?"

"Something . . . something I set store by——"

"What is it, I say?"

"Wal, it's . . . it's my Sabby tippet. I want Titey should have it, for he must have wore his old one out this hull year he's be'n away. He can wear mine for bettermost this winter."

. . . . . .

It was very hot for the next twenty-four hours. The milk soured, and the dogs licked the grass. The stitch in Eliza's side was very bad. In the afternoon, as she was lying on the spare bed, tossing her lean bare arms over her head, and watching the sky over Bald Mountain for the longed-for thunder-clouds, there was heard a curious low boom to the westward, prolonged, renewed, and slowly dying away.

"Hark to the thunder!" cried Eliza.

Marm hurried to the window, but the sky was clear in all directions.

"That wan't thunder," said Marm, shaking her head.

"What was it, then?" asked Eliza sharply. "Thar 'tis again."

"I don't know, child, if 'tishn't the shound of gunnin'."

It was the guns at Bennington, reverberating among the mountains. Their low boom sounded again, and after it a murmurous commotion far down the south turnpike, with voices and horns which faintly echoed from Red Mountain back to Bald again.

"Marm Patridge! What's befalling?" cried Eliza, clutching her Marm by the sleeve.

The dogs began to bark, and the stag-hound bayed.

Budsey ran in, with Naomi at his heels. Her butternut frock was hanging off her shoulders as usual, and her stocking yarn was trailing and ravelling about her feet.

"Oh, Marm! sister—the Biters air a-marching back!"

"What shay? what shay?"

"I say the Biters air a-comin', and the haounds a-herdin' 'em——"

"And Peleg Sunderland's a-crackin' a long whip——"

"What do you mean, childern? Tell quick."

"We be a-telling! Their faces air all grime and sweat—oh, it's a ter'ble sight!"

"But father hain't amongst 'em."

"What do you shay, Naomye? Your father hain't thar?"

"No—father's missin'."

Eliza, with a little groan, sank down limp on the bed.

The commotion had increased to a medley of shouts, horns, and fifes. From the narrow windows the advance of the procession could be seen —a crowd of impish boys dancing clogs and reels, tooting and drumming, and singing the

hated liberty tune, "Town by Town." Behind them marched the forlorn and beaten Biters, some savagely lunging their heads and elbows at their captors (for their hands were tied), some trying amid the drowning sounds of the liberty tune to make their own song of "King Hancock" heard; while others walked in silence with bowed heads. Sunderland's hounds ran alongside, their tongues hanging out, and Sunderland himself marshalled them from behind with his loud whip.

No one knew who had betrayed the Biters. They had walked into an ambush in the tamarack swamp on the outskirts of Westminster; some forty Green Mountain Boys rising from the ragged underbrush like spirits of the underworld. By the glimmering light of stars they looked more like two hundred than two score. The startled Biters fled like sheep before the men of Westminster. Of all that tall-talking company but two showed fight—Mr. Greenpiece and Mr. Polke. Mr. Greenpiece had been spared for his

cloth and age. But Mr. Polke had sent a bullet too close to Peleg Sunderland's own ear; and he was mounted on a poor galled horse, and sent over the Red Pass to the new "liberty" jail at Manchester. Riding through the Red Woods as the moon rose, trying to plaster with mullein the horse's raw spots, he did not see his niece Pleiades Darby, wandering in the hollow, and murmuring over and over to herself:

"Wan't for nothing I rid down over those twenty waterbars a-Monday night."

The moon which was rising over the Red Woods rose too on the field of Bennington, where Titus Polke was lying on his face, with purple blood spouting from his ears.

CHAPTER IV

Eliza's Illness—The Green Silk

Art thou so pale, who wast so bland?

WHAT a dark winter was this on which the Polkes were now entering! It was said in Manchester that Mr. Polke gnawed the door of the jail in his desperation; but his captors would not set him free. Perhaps his captivity was in some ways a piece of good fortune for him. He was perhaps happier to be away from home in these days, where he could not see his favourite daughter's slender body visibly shrivelling away inside her garments. The stitch in Eliza's side hung on all winter. The least fatigue or excitement brought it on. She grew very listless, and would sit with her hands loosely clasped in her lap, in the midst of the busy family, neither joining in the talk, nor noticing the pauses in it, when

Marm Patridge would turn and give her a long look, and say,

"Elizy, child, you don't feel very peart?"

When directly spoken to, she would blink, and smile as if from far away, and say:

"I guess I shall smarten up when the snow melts."

This new anxiety really helped the Polkes to bear these long months, their father's imprisonment, and the sight of the new grave beside the churchyard fence, marked

Tytus, Son of
Richd & Sarah Polke
Aged 18 yrs. 7 mos. & 5 Days.
To Erre Is Human, To Forgive Divine.

Bleached by the equinoctial rains, and half buried in the snows, Eliza's poor little British flag now marked the head of the boy who had fallen fighting against it. Marm Patridge had placed it there. "The boy'sh a good Britisher now," she said; for she thought all good people were British

in heaven. "Hish mother'd want the flag at hish head, and hish father in jail'd be glad of it."

At last the snow began to melt, and to run down the swollen torrent of Roaring Branch. The Polkes could hear the cascades roar as they sat in the kitchen. Eliza now began to say,

"I guess I shall perk up when the popples leaf out."

The poplars leafed out, and the air began to be life-giving. Eliza now said:

"I guess I shall perk up when the turkeys take to the woods."

Before the turkeys took to the woods, on a windy May afternoon, when Budsey and Naomi came home from school, they found a paper nailed to their door by the *Gazette* rider. It was in their father's hand. Marm Patridge put on her spectacles with shaking fingers, to read it, while Budsey and Naomi jumped about her chair, and Eliza's eyes glowed in their bluish caverns.

"Deare Childn (& Marm P)," the letter read, "Yr Fathr is out of Gaol I gott away by Mad Tom woods & lay there over ye sugar thaw, now I be in ye House of a good Loyalst in Winhaul well & harty in Spight of prizzen fare wch was in ye last extream Misable If twere not for ye Treachrous passes of Stratton Mtn & Sunderland his bloody Houndes wd come strait hoame but fear for my Pate if I shd be Catched agen Is little Elizy spritelier—ye Boy is a Bawlin to me—so farewell fm yr Loveing Fathr

"Lett not one of ye Goald pieces be spent out of ye king his jar for any Sakes."

When the letter was read, Eliza sank back in her chair and clapped her hand to her side. To see her do so always unmanned Marm Patridge and made a sort of rage rise in Naomi's heart. Then they would try the medicine made by steeping toads in cider, and adding dried plantains and spices. Eliza smacked her lips over it, for she liked the spices; but it brought her no flesh nor strength. Candlelight brought back to her cheeks a portion of their old delicate, but glowing, fairness, but by the broad light of day her skin looked dry and sallow. As the spring ad-

vanced, Marm made errands to send her out into the air, though she still distrusted its "rawness"; or perhaps Eliza went, after a little urging, to see her aunt and cousins at the tollgate. From these outings she would return with a transient brightness, which wore off by tea-time.

While things were at this pass, Mrs. Darby came up one day in a great flutter, to give an important invitation. House services were then much in vogue in those parts, and of all the parlour-preaching ministers none was so much sought after as Master Berkly of Jamaica. Mrs. Darby, who was a very blue Presbyterian, had secured Master Berkly for her parlour.

"There's a-many wants to hear this discourse," she began, "but I shall save all my green chairs for my own kin; and I want you should be there, Marm—let poor little Elizy come with ye."

"Thanky, no," said Marm in her weak, troubled voice. "I hain't much heart for getherin'sh. I tell ye, Shue, when Titey died, I

thought I couldn't bear no more; and naow here'sh their father away and Lizy shick sho ash nobody knowsh what ailsh her, for she hain't no cough——"

"You keep Lizy too close to home. She hain't been down to the tollgate in a week. Why don't ye let her come a-Sabby afternoon, and sit under Master Barkly? It'll be a little aoutin' for her; p'haps she'll be the better for it."

"Wal, if it'sh a fine day, p'hapsh I'll fetch her. But she'll have to ride behind Budshey—she can't walk ash fur ash an old creeter like me," said Marm, beginning to cry.

When Sunday came, Eliza was dressed in her nice delaine, which hung loose on her, her pretty calash and black and green mitts, and was lifted into the saddle behind her stocky little brother. On their arrival at the tollgate, their aunt hung a shawl over a chair for Eliza, and she sat down, looking very listless, to hear that terrible sermon, to which she had come as a lamb to the slaughter.

The text was, "Let there not be found among you an enchanter, or a witch; a wizard, or a necromancer." At first Eliza sat mooning, as she did at home, but after a little she began to breathe fast, and the blood rushed to her cheeks, as she heard how poor little babies had been pricked in their beds, and screamed at their invisible tormentors before their parents' very eyes; and how at last a doll, stuck full of pins, had been found hidden in a neighbour's house. She heard how cows' udders were dried, and how hens were given the pip, all by the horrible brews of witches in their secret cellars; and how sounds of barking and singing were heard from the woods about the houses of witches, where neither mortal dog nor mortal bird could be seen by mortal eyes. Eliza drew her breath with a whistling sound. He was saying that a witch as far away as Jamaica could pinch a dog's or tabby's ears, and give a child in Beartown the ear-ache.—The early dusk fell over the scantily-leaved trees of the forest, and Eliza

thought she saw black dogs and dancing figures there. The sermon had done its work upon her simple brain and feeble nerves. She was shivering as she took her place on the good brown horse, and clasped little Saul's waist. Before the pleasant ride home, in the fern-smelling dusk, was over, she had seen strange animals in the woods, and heard voices on the wind. Her bonnet hung down her back as they jogged along, and her cheeks were burning red.

"Budsey, I see monkeys in the trees—I hear them gibbering!"

"Oh, hush, sister!"

"Budsey!"

"What say?"

"Look behind us if you dast, little brother."

The poor little boy, so tightly clasped by incarnate fear, gingerly turned and looked behind. The road, stretching down, ridged with waterbars, was clear as far as he could see in the gathering dusk.

"You may look, sister—there's naught behind us."

"Air you sure o' that? Git ap, Prince. Oh, ain't it ter'ble to be aout so late!"

"Why, it hain't but six o'clock."

"But it's so dark. What's that I hear? Don't you hear a curious noise?"

"I hear a woodchuck clawin' in his hole."

"I thought I heared a noise like a petticoat catched on a bramble."

"Foolishness! 'Twas a woodchuck." The little boy's sense and courage began to return as he saw the house and barn and poplar trees of home coming into view. But Eliza huddled closer to him as they climbed the last bar. On getting down, she was seized with the stitch in her side, and frightened them all with her crying.

"Oh, sister, here; we've het this crock for you to hold against you," cried Naomi, hurrying to Eliza with a hot crock in her apron.

"Take it away—I wun't touch it," said Eliza, shuddering.

"Marm Patridge, she wun't have the hot crock!"

"Wun't, hey? Wal, give her her snail-juish."

"It hain't any good," said Eliza. "I wun't taste of it."

"Sister, what makes you so peevish? Marm Patridge spiced this for ye."

"I wun't taste of it."

"What'sh come over you, Lizy? You wash alwaysh gentle and teachable," complained Marm Patridge weakly, coming in from the wood-house.

"Why can't ye find aout who's bewitched me?" cried Eliza fiercely.

"Bewitched ye?"

"Yis! that's what ails me."

Marm Patridge turned very white round the gills. She thought of the uncle who had died in a madhouse, and her weak old head spun round

and round. But she said as firmly and sensibly as she could:

"Naow we wun't have any more talk of witchesh. You'll drink a cup of warm milk and lay down, and little Naomye 'll be here to wait on ye."

When Marm Patridge had stepped out, Eliza said suddenly to her little sister:

"I know who 'tis."

"What do you mean, sister?" asked Naomi, whose stout legs were shaking under her.

"I know who 'tis that's bewitched me. It's Pleiades Darby."

"You've be'n dreamin', sister."

"I tell ye I hain't. She's wished me harm a long while, and now it's come true."

"Sister, you're all unstringed, and don't know what you're saying."

"I hain't either, unstringed—I know very well." Eliza's brain seemed certainly to be turning. During the night she screamed out several

times with imaginary pinches. In the morning she was no better. The expression of her face had already begun to change: she looked at once frightened and sullen. When she spoke, it was to complain. She thought she was tormented by blows, pricks, and pinches; and by monkeys in the tops of the poplar trees outside, who looked in at the windows, making faces and gibbering at her. Sometimes her arms had black and blue marks on them, where she had pinched herself in her hallucinations. Marm tried to sleep with her, but Eliza would push her out of the bed. The children caught the panic in the house. Neither of them would go into a dark room alone, and they slept with the bedclothes over their heads. All her life long Naomi could remember the very sound of her poor sister's cries,—"Oh, she's pinching me! She's tickling me!" and could see, in her mind's eye, the black and blue marks on Eliza's body.

The Beartown doctor had no medicine for this

sort of sickness. The old doctor from Westminster came up the mountain, looked at her, scraped her tongue, and gave her a vial of lily-water. She was growing gaunt and swarthy. She was carried to the garret, where she might feel the freshest air blowing over her; she was brought down again to the living-room settle, where she could watch the passing along the turnpike; and all in vain.

Naomi was waked up, long before daylight, one morning, by Eliza's dreadful cries:

"Oh, how she pulls my ears! Oh! Oh! Let me be, or I'll harm ye! Hain't anybody comin' to purtect me from her?"

"Yes, yes, sister—I'll come!" called Naomi, running barefoot in her nightgown across the garret. But on the stairs she met Marm, painfully climbing up.

"Come with me, Naomye. Your shister'sh quiet—fetch your brother, and both of ye come with me." Marm was very solemn. Naomi ran

back and waked up Budsey, and they all went down together to the living-room.

"Both of ye kneel down," said Marm. She knelt down herself between the children, and took a hand of each. Naomi had never felt anything so solemn except her mother's, and poor Titus's, funerals. Marm began to say the prayer of St. Chrysostom.

"Almighty God, when two or three air gathered together, thou wilt grant their prayersh; now shend Richard Polke home to hish childern, and lift up little Elizy from her bed, for if she hain't better . . . if she hain't better before long——" Marm broke off, weeping, and poor little Budsey too began to cry; but Naomi said "Amen." She felt too solemn to cry. She thought the Lord would hear.

Eliza had several bad turns on that day and the next. A dreadful addition to her moans and cries began—she herself gibbered, and screamed out that it was the monkeys that did so. Marm

trembled so that she could scarcely wait on her. Naomi said to her little brother:

"I guess the Lord didn't pay very much attention to that prayer we all said together, Budsey."

"There's father at the gate," said Budsey.

"What!"

"I see his old striped pantaloons."

Naomi sprang to the window. It was her father, certainly. His ancestral Peninsular pantaloons, once so tight, hung loose on him now. His black beard was very grey.

"Marm! Marm! here's father!"

"Childern! your father'sh home!"

"Hi, hi, father!"

They all fell on him, kissing and shouting, but he looked about him with troubled eyes, and asked, where was Eliza?

"Naomye, show your father."

Naomi took her father into the haunted bedroom, but when she saw him looking at Eliza, she could have pulled him away from the

bedside for pity. Eliza was asleep. Soon she began talking in her sleep, and once she cried in a loud sobbing voice:

"Marm! Naomye! She's at me again!" When Naomi flew to her side and waked her, she would exclaim coldly:

"Little sister, I will thank you to leave me to myself."

"Fetch me a stool," said Mr. Polke drearily.

He placed the high stool in the doorway, and sat down. Naomi brought him some frizzled pork, with berries and milk, but he would not touch them. He sat in his daughter's doorway almost all night, beating out of his brain a plan to cure her. It was the plan of a visionary and impulsive man, but of one who saw deep into the mind and heart of that frail creature tossing on the bed. He recollected the asking eyes, the craving mouth, the high, delicate, quivering nostril of his child in bygone days, as she used to press her pale face against the window on many an

afternoon, weary of her needlework and indoors prison.—At about three o'clock in the morning Naomi woke up, smelling the spicy odour of a bayberry candle in the garret. She saw her father at the feedbox in the corner. His candle stood on an apple barrel, and lighted up his visionary countenance. He drew out the jar buried deep in the feedbox, and took out two of the four sacred gold pieces they had saved for the king's cause. Naomi sat up in bed and watched her father down the ladder; and heard the south wind blowing up from the valley a long time before she could get to sleep.

When she woke again, the morning had dawned in rain, and her father was riding down the mountain with the moidores in his pocket. He rode into the town of his enemies, trotting through Westminster as boldly as Ethan Allen had once trotted through Albany. Only a few faces looked out of a few windows at him; a dog barked, and a peacock screamed; and a little

boy in petticoats began to sing, in his small voice, "Town by Town," as the sometime Captain of the Biters rode by. He dismounted at Amri Falconer's shop, and when he came out, some wistfully smiling women stood for a while looking after him and the parcel which he carried. He was back in the sad house again by dinner-time, lighting it up like a human sun. He was in a very happy, excited mood. He taught little Budsey the sword-exercise; he played creepy-crabby with Naomi; and when he had drunk some old hard cider, in the evening, he cut pigeon-wings and danced clogs on the kitchen table.

The sick girl was accustomed to sleep a broken sleep until about five o'clock in the morning, when the roosters crowed, the children came clumping down the ladder, and Naomi filled the yard with high treble shouts as she drove the cows up the turnpike. On this Saturday Eliza woke up feeling a curious twinge of colour under her eyelids. She opened them to see a dozen

breadths of bright green silk heaped all over her bed, and the sun shining on it. She shut her eyes —opened them—the strange and touching sound of her laugh was heard. She blinked at the dazzling vision; fingered it; it was the first time she had ever touched silk in the piece. "Who has buyed me this?" she wondered. "Marm has buyed it with the seed-money! Oh, no—I guess I'm dreaming." She rubbed her pale cheek with it. She could not keep her fingers off it. The roosters crowed below; the sun shone on the cabbages; she heard the churn in the woodhouse. Budsey, in his long apron, carried the bucket up from the well. For the first time in many a week, Eliza wished she were up and dressed.

Naomi, clumping down the garret ladder with her purple calico hanging off her shoulder, heard her poor sister's tinkling laughter and rejoiced very much. "Oh, Budsey," cried the sisterly child, as she raced out to the stable, "did you hear her? did you hear Elizy laughing?"

"She'll git well, naow, probable," said Budsey.

"Father cured her!"

"Father? Haow did he contrive it?"

"I don't know! I don't know! P'haps he catched the toad that has the lucky jewil in its head."

Eliza was lying in the sun, with the silk drawn up to her chin, when Marm came labouring upstairs with a dish of suppawn for her breakfast. Eliza wanted no breakfast but the feast of colour which she was drinking in with her gentle, sunken, craving eyes. Marm saw how well the charm had worked, and beckoned Mr. Polke, who crept to the doorway on his stocking feet. He heard Eliza say:

"I know, Marm Patridge, you buyed me this dress aout of the seed-money."

"Guesh again, Mishtresh Lizy."

"I warrant you did, though."

"Do you want I should tell ye who buyed it for ye?"

"Yes, yes—tell me quick."

"'Twash your father."

"Father! Is father to home?"

"Yish."

Eliza got out of bed, with a little swaying.

"Git back to bed!" cried the old woman in alarm.

"I want father!"

"You hain't ash well ash you think you be!"

"I tell ye I want my father." Sweeter music than that call for him, Mr. Polke thought he had never heard.

On Sunday Eliza was up and dressed. On Monday she began hinting subtly to Marm,

"Have you got any quilts pieced up ready for quiltin'?"

"Ash many ash three."

"What patterns be they, hey?"

"Job'sh Trouble, and Tare-and-Trett."

"I should admire to see Job's Trouble tufted."

"Wal, child," said Marm, "when you feel well enough, we can have a quiltin'."

"I feel 'most well enough to-day."

Marm considered.

"Wal—I could take hold of your new shilk thish very afternoon, if I let the little onesh wait for their new dudsh."

"My duds can wait—my duds can wait!" cried the sisterly one. "I can wear my old butternut Sabbies, and weekdays, and all!"

There was a quilting at the Polkes' in early July. Eliza was still feeble, but she was getting her colour back, and excitement made her stronger than she was, for this one evening. Naomi and Budsey were allowed to stay up to the quilting. Budsey wore his old yellow pantaloons, with yet one more of Marm's quaint patches, like no other patches that ever were on sea or land, set into them; and Naomi wore her ancient butternut calico, lengthened, with a frill of buff ticking, to a decent point below her ankles. Little

cared the sisterly one, when she could see Eliza, beautiful in her shining woodland green, with her fair complexion and silky ringlets, dancing the Needle's Eye and Meadow Mouse with all the tallest beaus in the town!

CHAPTER V

The Arrival of the Lucys—Eliza Goes to Jamaica

They clicked the light heel
In the strathspey and reel.

WONDERFUL was the change that now came over Eliza Polke. From the magical appearance of the silk, a new world had seemed to open on her view. All those cravings after pleasure which her delicate, confined childhood had left unsatisfied, now began to disappear from her heart and eyes. She made up now for all that wearisome needlework. If she sewed nowadays, it was at some new-fangled piece of finery to wear to the huskings, quiltings, and spelling matches where she was such a belle. Her dreadful illness seemed nothing but a bad dream, not only to herself, but to the family. Naomi, as the years went on, could only think of that deli-

cate Eliza of her early years as another little lost sister!

Eliza in her seventeenth year was decidedly the beauty of the family, casting her sister Abigail in the shade. Her long hair hung naturally in ringlets, her cheeks were a clear azalea; her blue eyes, which were both lively and liquid, were shaded by wan, bluely veined lids and long lashes. Her disposition was growing both charming and troublesome; for the eagerness with which she indulged her whims seemed excuse enough for them. It was actually growing hard to control Eliza. Her father sometimes shook his head over her. Marm Patridge, with a shrewd look, said:

"Lizy'sh too pretty to be hulshome—she'll make trouble in the taown."

Naomi felt deserted and left behind in the race of growing up. She began to feel, and to look, wistful. Debbe Darby, who had once been her playmate, had of late become young-ladified, and followed and aped Eliza. Budsey was growing

too big and boyish to play with her. He tagged after his father, with his hands in the pockets of his skin-tight nankeen trousers, and made himself a little bean-gun with which he went off hunting in the woods. If he killed a mole or a baby muskrat, he would skin it for Naomi (who vainly tried to make him forego his manly, but as she thought bloody, sports)—but he would never be her playmate any more. Naomi did not know how much she herself was changing too. The indescribable longings and lookings ahead, of which she was conscious, were signs that she was not, after all, being left behind in the race of growing up, though her dresses were still short, and she was still the slender shape of a little girl. Until she was twelve or thirteen, she had been altogether a child;—the capture of the Biters, the bringing home of poor Titus, and Eliza's illness formed all her past. But now she began to mark her life "by lustres," events important to herself, but unknown to those about her. The morning

when she had watched the sun rise over Westminster with such and such hopes and longings—the dark rainy afternoon when she had indulged such and such fancies over her hetchel—these were events in her life far exceeding in importance the dipping of candles, and the bartering of homespun for tea and brandy at the store. How often nowadays was she recalled from absent musings by the old saying:

"Come down out of the clouds, Naomye!"

The autumn of 1781 came on very fine, with frosts in the middle of September, the leaves hanging on the trees a long time after changing colour, and an October without a single rainy day—thirty-one mild, mellow, apple-ripening days. The blue haze hung over Jamaica and veiled its fields of golden corn. This was Naomi's favourite season—Eliza's too, for it brought the huskings, the gayest parties of the year. Eliza had long forgotten how a stitch in the side could feel. Scarcely three years from

her nightmare illness, she was dancing almost all night at a tavern ball in Jamaica.

When a young bachelor of the same town invited her to a husking on the last day of October, Mr. Polke at first refused to let her go. She had danced too late, he said, at the tavern ball; and Jamaica was too far. But he ended as usual by yielding to the mute pleading of Eliza's eyes. She might go, he said, if Saul would take her, and would have her at home again by eleven o'clock; for he could not leave the parish meeting himself on that night.

Eliza spent the whole afternoon in looping up her polonaise with some rosettes which she made out of the train of it. When Naomi saw her pretty sister prinking for the husking, she felt more wistful and deserted than ever. She said:

"Lizy, I hain't got anybody to play with."

Eliza turned, buttoning up her charming dress of faded maize and green.

"Where's Budsey?"

"He's out huntin' gophers in the Branch paster. I don't go anywhere with him any more, he stomps and scolds me so."

"Why don't ye sew on your pretty patches?"

"I can't set still to sew—I feel sech a thinkin' in my head."

"Where's your husk-dolly?"

"I don't feel to play with her any more."

"You're a curious child—what ails ye?"

"I don't know, sister."

"Wal, p'haps I know. P'haps you want to go to a huskin', and have your petticoats down to your heels, and be called Mistress Naomye."

Naomi made no answer. She was lying on top of the feedbox, now looking up at the beams with wasps' nests hanging from them, now down the turnpike where the sun was setting. Eliza stepped across the ladder-hole and said pleasantly:

"Never you mind, Naomye. You'll be a young

lady soon, and I'll give ye this dress, p'haps, when I'm married."

"It's a sweet pretty dress," said Naomi, "and you look sweet pretty in it, Lizy."

"Thanky," said Eliza, running down the garret ladder holding up her dress, and showing her shoes laced round her ankles with maize-coloured strings. Naomi lay still, looking down the turnpike as if it were the road to a place where wandering wishes came true. Marm Patridge came up with a pan to get some cornmeal, and sat down on a chest to rest her gouty knees.

"Why, Naomye Polke, why hain't you out doin' your evenin' choresh?"

"'Tain't five o'clock yit, Marm Patridge."

"It'sh high time you wash to work. I can't bear to shee a child mope. Air you feverish? Let me feel of your forehead. 'Tain't hot."

"No, I hain't sick, Marm Patridge, thanky," said Naomi, still gazing out with absent eyes. There was a little cavalcade mounting the turn-

pike—a woman on horseback, a child on horseback, and a man, with a tall spindling girl, walking behind. When Naomi noticed them, she cried,

"Why, who be these, Marm Patridge?"

The old woman hobbled to the window.

"Naomye Polke, it'sh that family from Charlotte Caounty, I warrant my wig!"

"What they doin' here?"

"Hain't you heared your father tell? They're Toriesh from Charlotte Caounty—they wash run aout of taown for it."

Naomi looked with interest at the cavalcade. The girl on foot was thin and bashful-looking. The little one on horseback had a shock of black hair falling all over its face. The man had a sword at his side, and an order on his breast.

Such was the entry of the Lucys into Beartown. They slowly passed the Pouncet and Byjam houses, the Darbys' and the Polkes'; and turned in at the deserted sugar-house, where the

younger child was put to sleep in the sapkettle. The despised loyalists were welcome in this loyalist town. They arrived at sundown—before seven o'clock it was known in every house that the father had been a Captain in the British army, and that both the children had heathen names.

After tea, when Budsey and Eliza had set off for the husking, Marm filled a basket with eatables, and hobbled with it up to the saphouse; and Naomi followed a little way behind, hoping to get acquainted with the tall girl. The Lucy girl saw Naomi coming dawdling up the road, and said to herself, "Come along, red-haired little girl!" and opened the door and bashfully stepped outside. She looked like an old portrait. Her head, which was small, was set on a long slender neck, round which a loose necklace hung; her cheeks were the warm ivory of Sir Joshua Reynolds's ladies. She wore a short, tight, faded blue dress. Naomi's heart warmed to her. She said:

"My name's Naomye Polke. I live down here a little piece."

"My name's Flavia Lucy."

"How many brothers and sisters have you got?"

"I've only got one sister. A long while ago I had a brother, but he died."

"I've got two to home, and three married, and five dead."

"I wish there was a big b'iling of us, I can tell ye."

"Why?"

"So I wouldn't ever be lonesome."

"Air you lonesome?" cried Naomi. "So be I, for my sister Lizy's grown up, and my little brother wun't play with me no more."

"I'll play with you," said Flavia.

"Then you may wear this ring, that my brother Budsey made me out of a mole's tail," said Naomi, showing this valuable. "Budsey Polke is as smart as the nation, I can tell ye."

"What's his name, do you say?"

"Saul's his name; but we all call him Budsey. What was yours?"

"My brother was named Darius, for the king of Persia; and my little sister's Cassandra. That's a Roman lady's name, like mine."

"Oh, what beautiful, sweet names!" cried Naomi. She thought them so beautiful that she kept saying them over to herself as she dawdled homeward through the gathering dusk. As she undressed, she repeated them aloud to the squeaking mice; and after she had got into bed, she lay for a long time half awake and half asleep, thinking of the Lucy children and their pompous and beautiful names. She was awakened by Eliza's candle shining in her eyes.

"Wake up, Naomye," cried Eliza, "and let me tell ye what a time I've had to Jamaiky! Oh, I've danced it! my feet was like feathers. I was dizzy, I was so whirled abaout. Oh, it was the wildest huskin'! Father would have brought me

home if he'd be'n there. The fiddler played the sweetest gallops I ever heared. He was a handsome boy. I had some words with him. Look, Naomye! he throwed me this as I danced past him." She showed a velvet rose with a green silk leaf.

"Lizy, you're all agog—you'd better git to bed. You wun't be up till all haours."

"I don't care if I sleep as late as six o'clock! Oh, those pretty gallops—I can hear 'em now. Budsey came and twitched my sleeve, and said he'd fetch me home; but I saw the moon was high yit, so I stayed for one more prance around the barn."

"Did anybody husk any red ears?" *

"Oh, yes, Budsey had one, and Mace Paouncet, he had one . . . and the fiddler had one——"

"Your cheeks air so red as I never saw 'em before, Lizy."

* A red ear of corn at a husking entitled the young man who husked it to kiss all the girls.

"Air they?" asked Eliza, holding up her tiny blurred handglass first to one beautiful cheek, then to the other, and smiling in a strange way, as if her thoughts charmed and yet frightened her at once. Naomi forgot to talk, and lay staring up at the beams, and thinking of the Lucys. If the sisters had been growing apart before, they were now divided by a great arm of the sea of life. The thoughts of each were strange to the other; they lived in different worlds, though they slept on the same pillow.

Early on the next Sunday evening, while the family were sitting on the portico, watching the sunshine recede, field by field, from the valley, Budsey Saul, who had been looking down the road, cried:

"Here comes your fiddler, Lizy!"

Naomi looked, not down the road, but at her sister's face, and she saw the red pennant flying there, as a horse and rider came into view above the last waterbar. Eliza slipped into the house.

All her family now sat looking at her fiddler as he rode swaggering to the gate. He was short and slight, but very handsome and spirited-looking; he was dressed in a long bright blue coat, fawn-coloured breeches, and silk stockings. Budsey was almost as tall as he, and yet he felt the fiddler looking down upon him as from a height. This appearance was caused by the fiddler throwing back his head and squinting slightly. On his asking for Mistress Elizy, she came out dressed in her maize and green dress, with the velvet rose at her breast. She seemed to see no one but the fiddler, walked straight to him through the ranks of the family, and led him into the house.

"One of *my* beaush wash a fiddler, too," said Mrs. Patridge. "But my brother Eliash vowed I shouldn't have him if he wash the only bachelder or widower in taown; for he wash a peevy, ailin' creeter."

Mr. Polke said nothing. Naomi and Budsey were sent to bed when the owls began to hoot and

screech. After a long visit, the fiddler took his leave, and Eliza stood in the doorway and watched him ride away. When he was far enough out of hearing, her father turned to her, and said, in a troubled, kind, embarrassed voice,

"Lizy, my dear, your father was wrong to let ye go to Jamaiky, and you so young and green. Budsey was too little to go with ye. I see you've made friends with a young man I don't like the looks of, nor yet the name he's got for himself in this caounty. I pass over his being a nevew of Peleg Sunderland's, though his father was a rebel too, and 's daown in Virginia naow, fightin' against his king—but as to that, there's be'n a madness all over the country a long while," said Mr. Polke, shaking his long grey beard. "I pass over his father's and his uncle's doin's. But I don't like his reputation in this caounty. If father'd a-knowed Frederick Dukes was to fiddle to that huskin', he'd have kept his little girl to home. But it hain't too late. If he rides up here

next Sabby-day, I'll see him and tell him my Lizy's to home no more to him."

Eliza turned away without a word, and reached the garret before she began to cry. She did not hear her old Marm adding:

"Peevy creetersh fiddlersh air—Lizy don't want one for her beau."

Naomi woke up and saw her poor pretty sister sitting on the floor in her best dress, her face hidden in the hanging quilts, and her shoulders twitching. She called:

"Come to bed and warm ye, sister!" but Eliza took no notice.

"What ails ye, sister?" Eliza made no reply.

Naomi went over to her where she crouched by the quilts.

"Sister! doos your tooth haowl?"

"Oh, no, child—leave me alone."

"Haow can I leave you alone, when you set on the floor and cry?"

"Leave me be, I tell ye, in my misery."

"Oh, sister, you're very unhappy."

"Yis, I be—very mis'able."

Naomi stood patting Eliza's shoulder, until her feet and ankles were chilled by the night wind. Her pats were balm to the angry grieving which Eliza felt; for it was nothing but angry grieving; it was not misery at all. Mixed with it were feelings of excitement, pride, and undeserved great joy. She breathed over to herself the fiddler's words, and saw his small, shapely form painted on the shadows of the garret. For better or worse, she was sure her fate had come.

CHAPTER VI

Eliza Sulks

WHEN Eliza awoke the next morning she had no colour in her cheeks, and nothing to say to any one. She went about her work all day with a face like a mask. Her angry silence was like a blow in the face to her father; it reproached him, and made his conscience seem no longer clear toward his child. Little Saul and Naomi felt a dreariness in the house. Budsey took his bean-gun, and went out to play, but the sisterly one followed Eliza about with timid efforts to attract her downcast eyes, or provoke her lovely, sullen lips to smile. At dinner Marm spoke across the sulking girl and recommended her father to smack her. Eliza would not thus be tempted to lift her heavy lids. She ate and drank in gloom, and went away to her churn. When she was gone, Marm said:

"She'll be aout of her shulksh to-morrow, nevew. It'sh all dander and pride."

Marm Patridge was a shrewd observer, but she was mistaken in supposing that Eliza would be her old self very soon again. Her sullen silence continued all that week. No one could tell how much miserable pride Eliza took in hanging like a pall over the meal-time and evening sociability of the family. Sometimes on fine afternoons she went out in the direction of the tollgate—no one asked where, or followed, or pried into her comings and goings. Sometimes she carried dishes of sauce or pie with her, and Marm guessed that she was taking them to Pleiades, and said:

"That'sh right, child—do you be kind to your poor coushin."

Pleiades Darby was far gone in a sort of melancholia. It must run in the family, Marm thought, remembering Eliza's terrible sickness, and wondering with a sinking heart if now it were coming on again. Her fears would quickly

have flown away if she could have seen the changed Eliza in the tollgate kitchen. While Pleiades sat moodily picking at her work, Eliza and the feather-headed Debbe sat off in a corner whispering together. They took walks down the turnpike, and Eliza came back very glowing; but she was careful to put on her morose look again before she got home. Marm Patridge was partly right when she said that Eliza's gloom was all temper and pride. "She'sh got her dander up, and she'sh praoud of it—she likesh to make trouble, I tell ye," the shrewd old woman would say, trying to convince herself that this was all. But on the very next day she would be stewing a quince, or making a tart, for the ungracious one.

While Eliza was thus comporting herself, and causing worry and sadness to those who loved her, Naomi was beginning to taste the pleasure of having a confidential friend of her own age. Flavia Lucy and she would often nowadays walk

to and from school arm in arm, holding long conversations on large subjects. Naomi's mind expanded, her eager thoughts flew between earth and heaven; and she and Flavia were, if they had but known it, almost talking in poetry on some of those Indian summer afternoons. Naomi began to think that the greatest event in her life was the day when the Lucys had come to Beartown.

When the winter came, after this prolonged mellow autumn, it brought a succession of such storms as had not been known on Bald Mountain since white men settled there. The drifts were deeper than the heaviest horse could plough through, and yet there were always bald spots where the yellow ruts showed like skeleton ribs, and where sleighs could not be drawn. The wind from the south, which blew up the valley for days in succession like a blast of vengeance, turned into a sort of whirlwind on the mountain's shoulder, and shook the houses from every side in turn. The snow sifted into the garret and into the

children's beds. The apples froze under their hoods of quilts. The children slept with cold feet, and the cheek which was not sunk in the pillow often ached in every tooth. Four or five funerals of babies passed up and down the turnpike this winter. The cold seemed to weaken the tough fibres of old men and women, and Marm Patridge this winter took on a frost-bitten, or age-dried look, which in spite of her lost teeth she had not had before.

Marm, when she saw that Eliza was not losing either flesh or strength, by degrees ceased to worry about her health; but she felt, like all the others, the shadow which Eliza cast over the household to be intolerable. If her father so much as looked at her, Eliza became as mute as a stone. When he spoke, she looked a thousand miles away. Marm fared little better. She might pat Eliza on the back, but the sulky girl would hang her head and barely endure it. Naomi could only rarely drag out a word from the

locked mouth of her sister. She did waylay Eliza one afternoon in the cold pantry, and asked her, somewhat timidly:

"Sister, what doos ail you? You never speak a syllable from morning till night; and you never play creepy-crabby with Budsey or me any more."

Eliza looked away.

"Your mouth hain't bitter, is it, sister?" continued Naomi in a faltering tone. "A bitter taste would make anybody sulk and cry. Do let me see your tongue, sister!"

Eliza almost smiled, but managed to maintain her knitted brows.

"Lizy, don't sulk at father, and make him so mis'able—think how teachable and pleasant you used to be, when you was younger; and don't make everything so gloomy in the haouse, sister! —She's gone and left me talking."

Eliza put her head back inside the pantry to mutter:

"You're a good child, Naomye. But I shall

never be happy in this haouse again." She went away, and in a little while, as Naomi sat, sewing her stint, at Marm's knees, she saw Eliza's quilted yellow petticoat flouncing through the drifts, and her green tippet blowing in the breeze, as she walked down to the tollgate.

At tea that evening Budsey said:

"Father, there's painters around again—we must bait the traps."

Naomi, who hated the traps which broke the panthers' and wildcats' legs and left them alive, crying fiercely in their pain, said:

"Oh, no, Budsey—you hain't seen any painters, I don't believe."

"I hain't seen 'em, but I heared 'em bellerin' over Tempe way this afternoon."

"Was you in the east woods?" asked Eliza, while every one looked up, surprised to hear her join in the talk.

"Yis, Bill Byjam and I go git the twigs this week for the school fire."

"Oh!" said Eliza.

"We fetched as many as three baskets. 'Twas dark when we came hum; and yit we saw a pair a-traipsin' in the Hollow."

Naomi saw Eliza bite her lip.

"Who wash it, child?" Marm Patridge asked, looking up over her saucer with blinking, troubled eyes.

"I don't know, Marm. All I saw was a petticoat flouncin' along, and a tippet a-blowin'."

Mr. Polke, awaking out of one of the reveries in which he was so often sunk, took a long look at Eliza. Her eyes were fixed on her trencher.

"Marm!" said Mr. Polke suddenly, "was Elizy out this afternoon?"

For the first time in many weeks, Eliza noticed what her father said.

"Yis," said she. "I went to set with Pleiades."

But after supper Marm Patridge came and twitched Mr. Polke's sleeve, and drew him after

her into the dark bedroom. She closed the door and said:

"Nevew, I have my daoubtsh about Elizy. I don't know what to think of her doin'sh."

"You may think she tells the truth, Mistress Patridge!"

"She turned ash red ash a beet while that talk wash goin' on to the tea-table."

"Wal, Marm, it'd be a poor day for us if our childern didn't speak the truth, and had to be spied on!" cried Mr. Polke warmly.

"I tell you, nevew, a great change hash come over the child."

"That's true, Marm, and it's bad to have her so sulky; but I can trust my sons and darters, and I shall."

Marm said no more, but she thought, "Richard Polke'sh growin' old, and I shall have to be a father ash well ash a mother to the young onesh." At dinner on the next day Marm asked:

"You goin' to the tollgate again to-day, Elizy?"

Eliza raised her head and said shortly:

"Yis, I be."

"Wal, I'll go with ye, and fetch 'em a few butternutsh."

Whatever scorn and anger Eliza felt, she showed nothing, for she neither spoke nor looked up again. Marm Patridge painfully hobbled to the tollgate with her on that day and several others; but she never saw anything except once or twice what she thought a meaning look between Eliza and the foolish Debbe; and she found it too wearisome to her gouty joints, and hateful to her mind, to tag Eliza about in this way. Sometimes she sent Naomi or Budsey after school to walk in the east woods or the Hollow; but they never met any couples walking there. Once Naomi went to the garret in the middle of the afternoon, and found Eliza sewing fringe round her hood; and when she saw some one looking, she tore it off in a temper. Yet, as the spring came on, her sulky silence began to

melt a very little, like the icy pools of the Branch. Sometimes now she even wore a sparkling look, as she stole a hand into her apron pocket and held it there. Marm noticed this, and drew Mr. Polke aside to tell him.

"Nevew!" she whispered, "the child hash got a token!"

"Wal, Marm P., what is it?"

"I don't know what 'tish, but she keepsh it in her apern pocket."

"I can't bear to have you spy on my darter, Marm Patridge. You're in her mother's place . . . . poor young one," said Mr. Polke, turning away.

Marm Patridge shook her grey head, on which the first tremblings of palsy had begun to take hold, and said to herself:

"Wal, I'll take care of the poor little feather-headed creeter, if I can. I hope her father'll never come to wish he hadn't buyed her that green shilk!"

Mr. Polke was really aging fast, and joining Marm Patridge in the world of old people. They talked together of the seeming wreck of the colonies in this long, ruinous war, which was dragging itself out in Jersey and the South; and recalled for each other the days when every village was loyal, and the name of the king was cheered even in Boston. Mr. Polke shook his magnificent beard as he watched little Budsey do the sword exercise. The little boy was well-grown for his age. He no longer had coughs in the spring and fall. He loved to sit, in these long evenings, listening to his father's account of the Indian wars of his boyhood, and his escape from Manchester Jail. Budsey sat with his ear of corn unshelled, listening, with a fine, thrilled look, to these tales. But he was full of childish humour too, and could mimic the dancing of every young man on Bald Mountain; he could shuffle and reel, and come down stamping like the most accomplished. He could draw good cari-

catures, and filled the margins of his Primer with tiny smirking portraits of the big girls in the Beartown school. Naomi felt a pride and happiness as deep as her heart could hold, in little Saul. His warts—his turned-up nose—his rough, coarse hair, were handsome to her. She thought his dancing wonderful, and his drawings beyond compare. Wherever he came, he could always make for her "a sunshine in a shady place." In her box, under her Sabbath mitts, she kept the catfish's eye which he had once scraped for her, together with a button from his first breeches, and the ring made of the mole's tail which she had once let Flavia wear. She often thought, if the house should burn down, like the Byjams', she would carry these valuables out first, and come back for her best dress.

Many such fancies were in her mind as she wandered along to Flavia's one April afternoon, with her bag of coloured beads. Flavia brought out her bag of beads, and the friends sat down in

the neglected Lucy orchard, where they could see their townsmen ploughing and harrowing the fields on either side; and where they could see Hester Pouncet too, sitting and spinning at her window.

"Haow long it seems since Hester used to play with us!" said Flavia.

"It hain't but a few months." Naomi spoke with her head on one side, and her eyes focussed for a hundred miles away.

"A great deal can happen in a few months," said Flavia sententiously.

"Hunh?" asked Naomi, not listening.

"I said, a great deal can happen in a few months."

"Yes, it can. My sister Lizy has fallen in love, for one thing."

"Your sister Lizy! Is *that* what ails her?"

"I s'pose it's that. Hain't it curious?"

"Wal, wal! It's coming quite close to us, hain't it, Naomye?"

Naomi was silent a long time. "Flavy——"

"What say?"

"What if you and I was both to be old maids?"

"We shan't be, if we're good girls," said the wise Flavia.

"Good girls air old maids sometimes. If I was one, I know what I should do."

"What?"

"I'd git me a baby somewheres, and fetch it up for my own."

"You'd have to git it from the workhouse."

"Wal, then, I would," replied Naomi firmly.

"I shouldn't wonder if I was to be an old maid," said Flavia, "for I hain't very pretty."

"Yes, you be too! You're the prettiest, and the sweetest, and the best girl in Beartown; and if you're an old maid, I'll be one too, to comfort you!"

"Oh, Naomye, what a good friend you be!"

They leaned back against the pear-tree, and looked up into the clouds, and spoke their

thoughts freely, without any fear that either would laugh at the other; while the sun went down, unnoticed by them, behind the picture pine, and ants and grasshoppers ran away with their pretty beads.

CHAPTER VII

Alpheus and Marvette—The Black Saturday

That night the Baron dreamt of many a woe.

WHEN Flavia had modestly said that she was "not very pretty," Naomi had warmly contradicted her. Flavia, in her eyes, was pretty. She had a soft, colourless complexion, which only a blush would brighten, a bashful blue eye, and a deprecating mouth. Naomi's own looks were the opposite of Flavia's. She was stout, healthy, and cheerful-looking. Her skin beneath her freckles was tinted a lovely pink, and her reddish-chestnut hair, looped over her forehead, kept that white and unfreckled. In vain she tried to think that her hair was not red, but what Marm comfortingly called "amberowne." She sopped her cheeks in vinegar to drive away the kisses of the sun, but all in vain. Her lips were large, her

chin, alas, receded; her nose was turned up. She gazed sorrowfully at her reflection with her honest, vain, troubled grey eyes.

But these mournful moments before the looking-glass were not the moments when she looked her best. She should have seen herself "all agog" (as she called it) when Budsey was going through the sword exercise before his father; or when he brought home the red ticket of merit from school. She looked pretty enough then; for the colour in her cheeks blotted out the hateful freckles, and her large, homely, generous, tender mouth was smiling with love and pride.

She looked pretty enough in church, when the Psalms or the Prophets were read—"Babylon is fallen, is fallen;" or "Thy pomp is gone down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols;" or "Blow up the trumpet in the new moon!" Then her small breast heaved behind its buskboard, and she looked out the high church windows at the tree-tops as if she saw David there, playing his harp.

She looked pretty enough when walking alone in the woods, forgetful of the berries or eggs for which she had come; or talking with Flavia; or staring out, over her morning washbowl, at Westminster valley full of bright mist. Then thoughts sweeter than honey came into her mind, and she seemed to see her life unfolding like a path through the spring woods. The next turn might show a plantation of the ferny squirrel corn, or a mat of blue hepaticas. Young boys and girls feel such a glow and certainty of coming joy; for whatever in later life seems too pleasant to be true, in youth seems too pleasant to be mistaken.

It was a part of these rhapsodies of her early teens, that Naomi supposed they were peculiar to herself. She did not suppose that Flavia had the same feelings. It was a part, too, of their greatness that common words would not describe them. No! the terms which suited candle-dipping and apple-stringing would not do to tell Flavia

Naomi's new thoughts,—or to tell Naomi Flavia's.

By very slow degrees, in the month of May, Naomi began to be aware that Flavia Lucy had a secret from her. One of those blushes which so beautified Flavia first told her; and next, a fearful falling-off in Flavia's amount of spinning; and at last the burdock under the seckel-pear tree gave away the whole secret.

The friends were sitting on the circular bench under the pear-tree, when a chipmunk peeped from behind the great burdock, and Naomi cautiously parted the leaves to find his hole.

"Hi, hi, Naomye!" cried Flavia in alarm. "Let go o' that—I don't want you should handle that dock!"

"Why hain't I to handle it?"

"Wal, because. . . . I tell ye not to."

"Flavia Lucy, I see what the trouble is with *you!*"

"No, you don't—there hain't any trouble——"

"You've got a secret! I suspected it as much as a week ago."

Flavia said nothing.

"I'm your best bosom friend, and here you've got a secret from me."

"Hain't much of a secret," muttered Flavia.

"I'll bid you good-afternoon, Miss Lucy," said Naomi, gathering up all the pieces of Budsey's new pantaloons, which she had been stitching together.

"Set down again, Naomye! I'll tell ye what 'tis."

"P'haps I don't care to hear it, naow," said Naomi, but with a yearning glance toward the burdock.

"You may look for yourself, Naomye. I don't care if you know of it, but I don't want—sh! is that her?—I don't want my mother should know."

Thus mollified, Naomi approached the giant weed again, and parted its leaves—to find at the

roots a thick brown book, much worn, tied together with a tape.

"What ails you at this book?" asked Naomi, untying the tapes. "It looks like a pretty one."

"'Tis a pretty one," said Flavia. "A sweet pretty tale."

"Then what grudge has your mother got against it, hey?"

"Naomye Polke, it's a *novil!*"

"Is that anything against it?"

"Why, yis! You hain't got one in your haouse, have ye?"

"I don't know whether we have or not."

"Mother wouldn't let me read a novil for any sakes if she knowed of it. She says no young lady would read one. I guess any young lady would read this that could git her tabs on it! Fan Paouncet lent it to me. It's the sweetest tale, and the saddest one, you ever heared."

"What's the name of it?" asked Naomi.

" 'Alpheus and Maryette.' I was goin' to lend it to you as quick as I could finish it. Fan Paouncet said I could. I kep' it a secret from you because I was afeared—afeared you might forget, and let on to mother, or to Aunt Marye."

Naomi was not listening. She was reading the novel.

"Maryette," continued Flavia, "was a beautiful young lady. But very delicut. She was pale and slim, and no wonder, she'd be'n through such terrible scares. She was locked up in a lonesome castle, for one thing, because she wouldn't marry the wicked Marquis."

"What happened to her then? Did she die? or what befell to her?"

"Oh, no—there was a young man around named Alpheus. He was a good deal bigger punkins than the Marquis. Maryette was in love with him."

"Wal, what did *he* do?"

"Why, he gave a hull gallon of whiskey to the

sentinel, and got into the castle, and fetched aout Maryette."

"I s'pose he was in love with her?"

"Wal, I guess yes! I never heared of anybody so much in love."

"Then they git married, don't they?"

"Git married—oh, no! I've peeked over into the tail end of it, and it says they died locked in one another's arms."

"Where does it tell about that?" asked Naomi.

"About which? Where they die, and so forth?"

"No, not that. About her . . . why, you know, . . . her being in love with this young man."

"I'll read it to ye. I never heared of anybody so much in love."

"Wal, find it and read it," said Naomi, surrendering the book to Flavia.

"You watch and see if anybody's coming, then."

Flavia found the place, and read to her friend the flowery description of Maryette's love for Alpheus. It carried them both far away from the pasture where they sat, to the

> "Magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in fairy lands forlorn."

As Naomi walked home, she thought:

"I wonder if Maryette was fonder of that Alpheus than I be of little Budsey? I can't scarcely believe it. P'haps Maryette was an only child, poor creeter."

In the night she awoke and lay thinking of Alpheus and Maryette. She looked at Eliza's dark head on the pillow beside her, the beautiful black braid hanging over the edge of the bed. Eliza was breathing very softly. Her younger sister gazed respectfully, and said to herself:

"Elizy's felt it—she feels it now. I wonder if she feels it in her sleep? P'haps she's dreaming about Alpheus—I mean the fiddler. Poor Elizy,

I pity her and yet I envy her. I wonder . . . if my turn'll ever come?"

Budsey Saul coughed in his sleep, behind the partition of quilts on the Tempe side of the garret. The sisterly child sat up with an anxious, puckered face, and her fancies all scattered and forgotten.

"That's the second time I've heared Budsey cough! He's kicked his comforter off, I warrant. I wouldn't have him cough again for any sakes. Three times inside of an hour means a cold on the lungs, Marm always says." She ran barefoot across the moonlit floor, and tucked the quilt about young Saul. Four times, half-awake, he flung it off, and each time Naomi patiently covered him up again. At last he submitted, and his disturbed slumber settled down again on his tanned face beneath its rough thatch of tow hair —that homely face which Naomi thought so handsome.

But Naomi, whose solicitude for her young

brother was as an Æolian harp to every wind that blew, knelt down beside his bed and prayed for a long time on his behalf.

"God bless my darling brother Budsey, and let him not have a cold on his lungs, but deliver him from this cough—let not the sun harm him by day, nor the moon by night. A thousand shall fall beside him, and ten thousand at his right hand, but let it not come nigh him. Make him grow as tall as Titey, and never have a hollow chest. Let him get up to the head of the spelling class, and stay there a hull week. But let him not cough the third time, for Marm says, etc. Amen."

Thus Naomi prayed, and not for the first time, kneeling on the cold garret floor, and trying to cover Budsey's whole future, up to old age, with sisterly hopes and plans, and mapping out a hundred blessings for him!

When she awoke in the morning, she was not at all startled to find herself alone in the bed

which she shared with Eliza. Even when she spied Eliza's everyday dress still hanging on its nail, she only thought:

"Lizy's gone out early to pick the worms off the cabbages; but how came she not to put on her old gown? She's worn that polonaise of Marm's, I warrant." She gave it no more consideration, but sprang up and buttoned her calico, by its one wooden billet, round her neck, and raced away to the woods with a basket on her arm, for partridge eggs. No one else was awake in the house; it was not yet five o'clock. She knew where to look for partridge nests in the roots of trees beside the water; and she had filled her basket and started homeward, when—who was this running so pell-mell through the briers and underbrush, tearing his pantaloons? It was Budsey, panting, and calling, "Naomye! Naomye! Where be you?" His eyes were bulging, his hair wet, and his cheeks were scarlet.

"What's wanted, little brother?" shouted

Naomi, crashing through the blackberry vines.

"You're wanted to hum! Elizy's gone!" he shouted back.

"What say?"

"Sister Lizy's gone!"

"Elizy gone! Gone where?"

"Nobody knows. You're to hasten hum, and let what eggs you can't run with, be."

"Marm told me to fetch 'em home."

"Fetch 'em then, but leg it better than that, you snail. I'm all beat aout trying to keep back with ye," prevaricated the little boy, who was well-nigh tired out.

"Elizy gone!" repeated Naomi in her deep amazement, as she ran alongside her brother through the yellow-green glades. "Nobody knows where, you say? Did she flee away with the fiddler?"

"I tell ye I don't know. All I know is, that

she took the white mare;—and the black's lame; and father's at his wits' end. She left a piece of paper for father, and he sets and reads it, and shakes his head over it."

"What doos she say in the paper?"

"I don't know. Can't you leg it faster? You must be too fleshy to run."

With such bold remarks the little boy covered up the fact that he could scarcely run himself, and was puffing and panting.

Marm Patridge met them at the gate. She looked blown and dishevelled. She still had on her nightcap, and her pocket was hanging outside her dress, and her eyes looked smarting. She took Naomi by the shoulders, and walked her into the house.

"Come in here, Naomye, till I tell you thish bad newsh about your shister," said she. Naomi too began to cry; the morning darkened, and the atmosphere of home was chilled, as if there were a fog indoors.

"Your shister hash fled away with that fiddler, Naomye," said her old Marm severely.

Naomi said nothing, but stared at Marm Patridge.

"She'sh left a letter for your father. He wun't let nobody read it, but I know full well what'sh in it. Your shister *hain't be'n a good girl.*"

"I know she wa'nt, Marm, of late. She sulked a great deal."

Marm Patridge wept afresh. "Wal, wal," said she, "you'd better go and comfort your father with your prattle, if you can."

"Oh," thought Naomi, as she wandered through the house, "I wish I'd a-picked her goose for her—I wish I'd let her have the squaw's bead mat when she was so set on it—and now she's gone, and I shall have to sleep all alone in our bed."

Her father sat in the kitchen, his large horny hands spread out on his knees (the veins very blue) and his back bent almost as double as the

great-grandfather of the Pouncets. Naomi went close to him, but he did not see her; she courtesied until her calico brushed his knee, but he took no notice; and at last she had to pull his sleeve. Then he drew her down on his lap, and patted her back.

"Father, Elizy wan't a very good girl, but she was so troubled——"

"How do you mean she wan't a good girl?"

"Why, she sulked so, and drawed such a long face; but she was so unhappy, father, you might forgive her."

"I forgive her all her sulks, my dear."

"Oh, father, when will she come back?"

"Who can tell, my dear? If she comes, I daoubt it'll be like a thief in the night, as she went away."

"Oh, father, don't speak so, and make it all so black!" cried poor Naomi.

Her father, instead of replying, slowly and painfully straightened his bent back, and slowly

drew a folded paper from his pocket. He held it up before her.

"Stand up, Naomye. Toe that board in the floor. Hold up your head, and pull your frock straight."

She did so, with wondering looks.

"Naow take this paper in your hands. Naow look me in the eyes.—No, you hain't to read the paper. You're to say some words after me.

"I promise—say it slow, very slow—never to forget this eighteenth day of May in the year eighty-three. If ever I'm in danger of forgetting to be a good girl—say that——"

"'Forgetting to be a good girl,'" repeated Naomi clearly.

"I promise to think of this paper I hold in my hand, and remember I was forbidden to read it; and to think why."

"'To think why,'" repeated Naomi, who had been brought up to unquestioning obedience.

"That's all," concluded Mr. Polke heavily.

"But don't forget your prayers, and your text, 'Thou God seest me,' that your mother made all you childern larn, as soon as you was able to speak."

While Naomi was taking this vow, her fugitive sister, in a dark little parlour in Tempe, was being made Mrs. Frederick Dukes. Eliza was very happy. Yet some misgivings crossed her mind. Once she thought, "This is my father's mare, not my husband's—*I* purvided the mare for us to flee away on"; and again, as the Presbyterian minister's door closed behind them, she thought:

"Where will our home be? Shall I be a roving woman without a home?"

CHAPTER VIII

Gateways of the Enchanted Country

Kilmeny had been where the cock never crew,
Where the rain never fell, and the wind never blew.

"WHERE be you with that nutmeg, Naomye?"

Marm Patridge stood in the tiny square entry, calling upstairs. It was two years since that Black Saturday which had closed the doors of Naomi's little-girlhood behind her. Only a faint shadow had been left on her face of those wakeful nights when she had lain awake and wept to think:

"I might have carded Lizy's wool—I might have done her dipping for her—but it's too late now!"

Marm stood calling:

"Naomye! Naomye! Has the child fell in a fit?"

But now a faint tinkle reached her dull ears.

It came from the living-room where the new spinet stood, and sounded the jigging tune of "Weevily Wheat."

"Naomye Polke, you're at that instrument again, air you? Fetch me that nutmeg this instant to the kitchin!"

"Yes, Marm." Naomi slowly shut the spinet-lid—the gate to the enchanting moonshine country. She looked back more longingly than Lot's wife. Naomi Polke might appear very staid and stiff in her flat-breasted calico, but behind that buskboard beat a heart that loved sweet music, poetry, and all enchantments. She had not long been grating the nutmeg into Marm's batter, when she began to sing, to a monotonous no-tune of her own, some odd verses of an old ballad which she had picked up by heart from old Mr. Pouncet——

"The Percy out of Northumberland,
A vow to God made he,
That he would hunt on the mountains
Of Cheviot within days three——"

"Naomye!"

"What say, Marm?"

"Have you darned up that hole in my mantilly?"

"No, Marm—but I will after supper, certain." She began to beat the eggs again, and the fairy trumpeters whom Marm had driven away began to creep back, and to sound their silver marches through the kitchen——

"They were twenty hundred spearmen bold
Withouten any fail;
They were born along by the water of Tweed,
In the bounds of Teviotdale——"

"Naomye!"

"What say, Marm?"

"You hain't tried aout that lard, I don't believe!"

"Oh, my wig! no, I hain't!" replied Naomi in consternation, while all the gates of the enchanted country swung to behind her for that morning.

But when she had an errand down the south, or up the north, turnpike, she could wander un-

molested along the shoulder of Red Mountain, looking down between the pine and maple trunks to where the Branch roared along its narrow bed. Or she might follow a blaze of her own to the tiny pool in the Hollow, where the dead leaves lay heaped in a drift on the water; or she might lie on her back on Fox Cobble in the sunshine, her bonnet over her eyes; swelling with great thoughts, or feeling fairy presences. Then there was no one to call out sharply, with a twitch of her sleeve:

"Come down out of the clouds, Naomye!"

Her father often shook his head over this daughter; but not as he had shaken it over Eliza. Mr. Polke had a way of musing aloud as he sat resting in the slack of the afternoon, over his own life, and over the characters and prospects of his children.

"Saul's all his mother's child, ventur'some but stiddy—he has a barrel of good sense in his innards. He'll be a good brother to Naomye.

Thar was Josiph . . . thar was Charles . . . they was all good fellows but one—all but one; and he's paid the forfeit. One of my boys and one of my girls—wal, let her be forgotten . . . but I can't forgit her——

"Naomye's more like *my* sisters. *Their* frocks was always hangin' off one shoulder, and *their* hair'd blow into their eyes. Naomye takes after my side of the family. I hear her singin' like a mooner at times. Her mother's folks was all more worldly-wise, and up-and-comin'. But her freckles she gets from her mother's side, poor little maouse. Her freckles air liable to injure her prospects in life, I'm afeared. I daoubt if she could wash 'em off with lemon juice. If her mother was alive, she'd put a stop to the child's runnin' out bareheaded; but Marm's too old to think of such things in a young spinster, important as they be—important as they be," repeated Mr. Polke to himself, shaking his beard.

"Naomye Polke moonsh a great deal for one

sho young," was Marm Patridge's opinion. "She should be at her wheel, gitting her shettin-aout of linen; or elshe a-trimmin' up her bunnit or her blue gownd. She hash a kind of an old-timey look. She ought to keep up with the fashionsh better. To be sure they do change very often. When I wash a girl one fashion would lasht one lifetime. But naowadaysh they change every ten or fifteen yearsh. That mantilly of her grandmother Patridgesh', that Naomye wearsh to church, ish all aout of fashion! 'Twash made forty or fifty yearsh ago!"

"Naomye doosn't care about the fashions," observed Budsey, who was greasing his boots on the other side of the fireplace.

"Don't care about the fashionsh, hey?"

"No, Marm—she doosn't care. She gits up into the garret with the old folio, and gits a shawl kind of draped around her, and a turkey-tail fan for a sword, and p'tends she's Cæsar, and calls aout:

" 'The Ides of March have come!'

and then she claps her hand to her side, and tumbles over on the feedbox, and sprawls there a-panting as if somebody had hit her a terrible whack."

"Play-actin'!"

"Or else she'll tie a nightcap round her head, wrong side foremost, and be a duke: or else she climbs up the chimney and says it's the Tower of London: or else she puts on my pantaloons and says——"

"Pantaloonsh!" shrieked Marm in horror.

"Oh, yes, and says she's Rosalind in the Forest of Arden."

"I don't shee why a darter of aour housh should behave sho," said Marm plaintively. "Flavy don't do sho. Debbe Darby don't; nor none of the Byjamsh."

"They hain't none of 'em smart enough to do so," cried Budsey loyally. "It takes some wit."

Flavia at that very moment was listening coldly

while Naomi repeated to her the darling ballad of the "Nut-Brown Maid," which she had found in an old *Gazette* in the woodhouse chamber; stopping from time to time to cry, "Haint *that* a handsome line!" or "What a sweet creeter she was—don't you think so, Flavy?" to all which Flavia would only reply:

"Well enough, but I don't see a great deal of sense to it."

"Don't you see what they meant by their speeches to one another?"

"No, I can't see what they meant, unless they meant to spin out the piece as long as they could."

Naomi sighed, and leaned her head heavily against the pear-tree. It was plain that Flavia did not care a great deal about the moonshine country. It was of no use trying to drag her through the poetry gate.

"You don't care for these things, do you, Flavia?" she asked. "I think you're changed in that respect. It seems more than two years ago

that you and I read that tale of Alpheus and Maryette."

"And you'll be seventeen in November."

"You'll be eighteen in April."

"Un-hunh.—That tale of Alpheus and Maryette was pretty silly."

"Silly!" cried Naomi, her bright flush overflooding her freckles.

"Why, yes, Naomye—don't you call it so?"

"Call a tale of true love silly, hey? The next thing you'll be calling the Bible silly."

"Hush, Naomye—you're almost swearing."

"I'd almost as lief you would call the Bible names!" cried Naomi indignantly.

"You hain't outgrowed novils and such truck, you see, Naomye. I've got beyond 'em," said Flavia calmly.

"Beyond 'em! Oh, Flavia!"

"You better be filling up your chest with pillowcases," continued Flavia. "You better be larning

yourself new recipes, than these long-winded ballats. What kind of a husband do you think 'll be pleased with you if you don't larn anything useful?"

"I guess my cupcakes air pretty nigh as good as yours be, Mistress Flavia Lucy! Marm Patridge's goin' to have me bake a batch of 'em for the Fair!" cried Naomi.

"Cup-cakes air very well; but your raised breads hain't all they should be," said Flavia.

"Mistress Paouncet said I scalloped my night-caps full as fine as her Hester!"

"Wal—but Marm has to make Budsey's Sabbath shirts because you hain't able to set up the bosoms," returned Flavia judicially.

Naomi, almost crying, muttered, "I shall larn in time."

"Certain you will, Naomye, if you put the hull of your mind to it. But that seems a very hard thing for you to do. Your head's most always in the clouds."

CHAPTER IX

Flavia Obeys Her Mother

That which is tender layeth hold on that which is nearest unto it, and groweth with it, and becometh like it.

MISTRESS LUCY was a hopelessly shiftless woman in all regards but one. Her cupboards were overflowing with crockery, books, clothes, and old family relics, all jumbled together. On her pantry shelves her gold wedding bracelets might be found in the teapot, where they were steeped more than once in the tea: large pieces of cheese mouldered away in the warming-pan; the curtains were torn, the barn-door off its hinges, the leaves were never raked off the grass, but the little pigs rooted among them for nuts, and the hens laid their eggs in the broken foundations. Mistress Lucy meanwhile was beginning elaborate embroideries, never to be finished, or making "cut-work" out of paper, to lumber the

rickety living-room table still further. A fine landscape hung in the kitchen, in the reek and smoke, and the rats which rolled apples across the kitchen floor in broad daylight had even nibbled a hole in it, while the mistress of the house sat drawing new patterns for nightcaps. Flavia had certainly not inherited her practical capability from her mother. Only in one thing was Mistress Lucy forehanded,—only at one task did she persevere until it was accomplished,—and that was her determination to have her elder daughter married before her younger.

Flavia had arrived at the age of twenty-one practically unsought. Tall, refined, and gentle, with a painful bashfulness in company, her "countenance," though it had not beauty, was called "pleasing," and her "ways," though neither animated nor charming, were commended by her elders for being "modest." From time to time she had an incipient admirer or two, but she always discouraged them by her bashful silence

and evident longing to have them go away. She tried conscientiously to "sparkle," as her mother wished; but the result was sadder than before. In addition to her natural shyness, Flavia was placed in the most trying of situations for an awkward, neglected girl. She was a natural foil for her sister Cassandra. The thin child who had once slept in the sap-kettle was growing up, and daily growing more charming. While bashful Flavia timidly repulsed her partners at a dance, and sent them looking for other girls, Cassandra had only to glance, and, like bees to a flower, the boys flocked about her.

Mistress Lucy thus saw her elder child passing the heyday of her young womanhood unmarried and un-beau'd, and like Mistress Darby and Marm Patridge at a later date—like many mothers and aunts of that time, she decided to venture on that path where angels would fear to tread, and to choose a husband herself for Flavia.

Naomi saw, in church one evening, a tall sandy

man, whom she only knew by the name of Mr. Snodgrass of Westminster. He was intently looking at her friend across the aisle. "Well," said Naomi to herself, "I guess Mr. Snodgrass 'll know Flavy the next time he sees her." He was singing toward her now, with his clear tenor voice. After service he waited and offered her his arm. Naomi wondered if her friend's day had come, to take ship for that fabled shore where people dwelt who were in love? She wondered if Flavia felt as Maryette did on the fortieth page, where she met Alpheus in the forest?

On the next Sunday afternoon she met her friend out walking with Mr. Snodgrass toward the graveyard, that constant haunt of Beartown lovers. Flavia was hanging on her escort's arm; her face was downcast. As Naomi passed them, Flavia blushed; but the colour did not distract Naomi from noticing the timid look, not of happiness, in her eyes. Naomi lay awake for a little while that night, wondering and troubled.

She and Flavia had never rallied each other about beaux. They were too sincere and literal in their natures, as well as too ladylike, to do so. Again and again, in the days that followed, Naomi thought she could direct the conversation to Mr. Snodgrass; but though it often veered in that direction, it quickly blew away again, as if Flavia herself were on the defensive. However, Flavia went on quietly tatting all the time, without a quiver of the eyelids. She worked to such good advantage that she was able to announce before long:

"Here's most enough tattin' for my twelve longshorts."

Naomi was startled, for she had not supposed the affair was so far advanced as "longshorts."

"Flavy, I had you on my mind last night again. I've laid awake a-many nights on your account this fall."

"You're a curious creature, Naomye."

"Yes, I be a curious creature, I guess, but that

hain't to the point. I want you should let me ask you a question, and give me a true-blue answer."

Flavia trembled a little, she knew not why.

"Wal."

"Cross your heart, then."

"I cross my heart to speak you true,
You may cut it out unless I do,"

recited Flavia, like a good child.

"Wal, this is the question. Was you . . . oh, I can't say it, I don't believe. Let me whisper it to you. Was you happy last Sabbath afternoon when you walked in the graveyard?"

Flavia looked away. She was obliged to pause before she could frame her answer. Naomi leaned toward her, and pressed the question home.

"Remember Maryette in the forest! Did you know where you was stepping? Did you see me at the church door?"

"I don't know what you mean, Naomye."

"I know what *you* mean, Flavy, when you look so hard at Budsey's bonfire over thar!"

"Wal, Naomye, I hain't at all *un*happy."

"You hain't at all happy, Flavia!"

"I guess I'm happy enough."

"No, you hain't happy at all."

Flavia stared past Naomi, with a passive face.

"Flavia, you must stop your longshorts and all your sewin'. You must tell your mother how you feel. You must tell Mr. Snodgrass. You do very wrong to deceive him."

"I don't deceive him, Naomye. He knows how it is with me."

"And is he willin'?"

"Yes."

"He's a wicked man, then!"

"Hush, Naomye. How can you speak so?"

"I say he's a bad, wicked man."

"Hush—hush! You frighten me, Naomye. It hain't maidenly to speak so."

"I want to frighten you, Flavia Lucy, before it's too late to save ye!"

"It's too late, as you call it, already. We've promised one another."

"Oh, my dear, it can't be too late! when did you promise?"

"A-Saturday night."

"Oh, what a wicked woman I be, that I didn't speak before! I was very fain to speak to you a-Friday night to singing-school; but I was scared; my mind misgave me. I'll never forgive myself for this!"

"Poor Naomye!—hush, you silly. You needn't to fret, nor think you could 'a' had it different. My mind has be'n made up a long while, and I was sure of what I should do."

"Oh, Flavy, I'm sore afraid for you. You'll repent you when it's too late. Think of it naow, before the words air said between you—oh, think what you might feel, and what you do!"

"You needn't to fret, Naomye, and shake your

hair all down into your eyes. Mr. Snodgrass is a good man, and one I respect. A good purvider too. He's very kind and pleasant with me. I couldn't wish him different."

Naomi shivered a little. She felt chilled to the marrow of her bones.

"You silly Naomye, I guess I know what you're thinking of. You're thinking of the olden time when you and I was little girls, and when we used to spend hull afternoons lookin' over our pretty beads, and buildin' castles——"

"Yes! I think of those days, and wish they'd come back to us."

"But they can't. They're gone for ever."

"They come back to me," replied Naomi with kindling eyes. "If you want 'em, they'll come back. Oh, it's pleasant, when you're all alone, and those old fancies come twinkling through your mind—what if they hain't ever to come true?—but I believe they will, some day—wal, p'haps not in this lifetime. I want you should

have such fancies, Flavia, for they're as sweet now as ever they was, and they warm the cockles of your heart, and will for ever!"

For one moment, while Naomi was speaking, her friend's glance responded as if she understood; and then it relapsed into passive incredulity. After a little pause, Flavia replied:

"You mean well by me, Naomye, coming and trying to frighten me out of my promise. But I only see that we hain't at all alike, though we was brought up in the same community. P'haps I'm more settled by nature than you be. You want I should take pattern by you—I think you'd do well to take pattern by me—what do you think o' that, hey? If you had a husband, naow, you wouldn't be troubled by these curious thoughts you tell of. You say they hain't a trouble to ye. Wal, p'haps they hain't; but I should be troubled and vexed by 'em. My path's so plain, I can't but follow it. It pleases father and mother—it pleases Mr. Snodgrass full well."

"Don't think of them, my dear—think of Flavia Lucy!"

"Why, Naomye, it pleases me very well too."

"I'm sore afraid for you," said Naomi once more. She rose to go; but before leaving, she put her arm round her friend's neck, and whispered in her ear:

"Will you pray over it, Flavy? this one night?"

"Why, I pray over it every night!" replied Flavia. Her tone was serious and sincere. Naomi went home much perplexed. "For with stammering lips and another tongue will I speak to this people." This strange verse came into her mind and perplexed her yet more. Certainly Flavia was honest, she was sincere; how then could her conscience tell her false? Naomi was frowning and sullen all that evening. When such a question as this was fermenting in her mind, she could not bear to be spoken to. At bedtime she took the large Bible upstairs with her, and read late by the light of the candle. She read first in

the Gospels and Epistles, but they seemed to be speaking to some one else, and not to her. At length she opened to the old Prophets, and read their more mysterious and poetical pages; read of the doom of nations and mighty kings, the terrible and long-drawn vengeance of the Almighty as foreseen with mortal eyes. She was calmed with a sense of the greatness of her God, but her aching sense of Flavia's mistake was in no wise relieved. She sat frowning over the great book. "I eenamost think," she said aloud to the rats and mice sitting up on their haunches in the dark corners of the garret, "that the Bible's got nothing to say to me about Flavy's case. Oh!" Her eyes had fallen on these verses—

"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. . . . Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree."

When Naomi read these words, a light dawned

on her soul; she humbled her own standards, laughed at her fears for Flavia, and felt once more that settled ease of heart which was temperamentally hers. The Almighty's ways with Flavia were not her ways—not human ways at all, perhaps.

"How ridiculous I be, and what a figure I cut, to be thinking I must labour with Flavy to prevent this thing! It's curious—it's strange, that she should bring herself to do it; but as she says, we hain't all alike. Mr. Snodgrass, she says, is willing. I don't think much of him for *that*. But everything isn't to be done according to *my* idees, the Good Book says. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree.' That's a curious thing for the Book to say; for I've always heared that the myrtle's the flower of love!

"But I'm glad it hain't Budsey Polke that's doing this thing that Flavia Lucy's doing. I daoubt if I should be so easily reconciled to it in Budsey's case!"

CHAPTER X

Honours and Emoluments

BETWEEN huskings and parings, sugarings and barn-warmings, and sings and spells, Beartown was becoming a very gay place to live in. Naomi's best blue dress was in requisition as often as twice a week. But she was seldom or never a belle at these parties, which were apt to end (if they did not begin) with dancing. She and Flavia had always been too shy to throw about those saucy glances, or to toss their heads and turn away, drawing a young man after them by the eyelash, as they saw other girls doing. The light, bright, frivolous "You and I" talk would not come trippingly from their tongues. They were accustomed to sit, thoughtful and grave, on the edge of the dancers' world—sometimes beating time with their red wooden heels to

the fiddles, or clapping the best of the spread-eagles and pigeon-wings.

This was all very well so long as Naomi had a companion wall flower. But when Flavia married Mr. Snodgrass and went to Jamaica to live, it was rather forlorn to sit alone in a corner, while Isabella Byjam or Fanny Pouncet whirled by in the squashvine, light as the seeds of a dandelion. Their flying skirts brushed Naomi's knees, and seemed to waft airs of another world about her. She might forget it to-morrow, as she herded the turkeys through the painted aisles of the Red Woods,—or even to-night, when she awoke and heard the thunder, and the uprooted trees crashing over into the Branch; but who in her young years can help winking back a tear or two, as she sits lonely in the midst of pleasure?

"I guess, Marm," said Naomi on one of the mornings after, "I wun't go to the next party the Byjams have."

Marm pursed up her thousand-wrinkled face

and looked at the whites of Naomi's eyes. She asked anxiously:

"What ailsh you, child? Ish your tongue coated? Air you feverish?"

"Oh, no, Marm—my head's as cool as a cheese. But I guess I'm getting too old for these parties."

"Too old, hey? Why, haow old be you?"

"I'm 'most twenty-two," said Naomi sadly.

"Twenty-two, hey? Have any of your teeth fell aout? Air you bald? Do your jointsh crack?"

Naomi smiled a little wanly.

"A young maid hain't an old maid a minute before she'sh twenty-five," said Marm Patridge firmly. "She'sh in her prime at your age. Don't let me hear any more of thish nonshensh."

"Wal—but I never have any partners."

"Wun't your brother dansh with ye?"

"Yes—but he's gen'ally the only one."

Marm cocked her head on one side in deep thought for a few moments; then she rose on her

groaning joints and beckoned Naomi to follow her, saying:

"I guesh I know what'll fetch ye a few partnersh."

Marm had a cedar chest in the garret where she kept all her fineries of long ago. Out of this she now fished a pair of rainbow stockings, a blue sash with knotted fringe, and a monstrous comb topped with a silver bird. She gave them all to Naomi, and watched with delight the unquenchable vanity leap up and shine in her great-niece's deep eyes.

"Wal! did thoshe dudsh do ye any good, hey?" inquired Marm as Naomi came down the ladder on the morning after the Pouncets' large sugaring party, where she had worn the rainbow stockings, the sash, and the comb.

"Oh, yes, I had three or four partners," replied Naomi quite happily.

"Good enough—who wash they?"

"Budsey once; and then I sat out a spell of

three or four dances: and then I had a whirligig squashvine with Bill Byjam, and then I sat out a few more; and then I had a Hi-Betty with Mace Paouncet."

"Good enough—and who set by ye at supper?"

"Mr. Tibbald set one side, and Emily Byjam t'other."

"Wan't there boysh enough to go round?"

"Oh, yes, but there was seven or eight of 'em together as near as they could get to Fan Paouncet and little Cassie Lucy."

"Wash that little one there?"

"Oh, yes, Marm, and danced every dance, and split some of 'em in two."

When Naomi had gone to bake the breakfast cakes, her father said to Marm:

"It's uphill work, tryin' to have Naomye cut a figure at these doin's. She hain't one to shine before the fiddles. She's had that spinster look about her ever since she was born, poor little maouse! And then her freckles——"

"Shucksh, I tell ye! What air frecklesh? What'sh red hair? It hain't beauty—it'sh the beckoning eye that bringsh a girl partnersh."

"You can't make a sparkler aout of poor little Naomye," repeated Mr. Polke pensively.

"Wal, I shall do my besht for the child. My head'sh full of plansh about her. I intend she shall get the blue ribbon for her cupcakesh to the Valley Fair, too," said Marm firmly. "I mean she shall amount to shomething."

In pursuance of this design, Marm made Naomi practise the cupcakes twice a week all summer long. By the month of the Fair Naomi could place the puffed-over top exactly in the middle of each cake, and could fringe the edges deftly with fine slices of citron. She would undoubtedly have taken the blue ribbon had not Emily Byjam sent a dozen cupcakes as good as hers, with a stick of cinnamon on each representing a cannon, with clove seeds heaped in front for

cannon balls—which deservedly captured the prize.

"Don't you care, Naomye," said her father. "Yours air twice as pretty, with all that grass on 'em. Emily Byjam's a year or two older than you be, and her uncle's wife's sister was one of the judges. I can't see anything pretty in cannons on a cake," continued Mr. Polke. "The cannons on the wrong side have winned in this country." He began to sing the old loyalist song, "Hunting Shirts and Rifle Guns," coming out very strong on the last verse——

"Then Congress, and every such damn'd inquisition,
Be fed with hot sulphur from Lucifer's kitchen!
With their hunting shirts and rifle guns."

"Naomye'sh a-going to have that blue ribbon next year," said Marm.

"She'd have winned it this year," said Budsey, "if Emily Byjam hadn't fetched a pie to the judges for their dinner."

But before the Valley Fair again came round,

another honour had befallen Naomi, which caused the blue ribbon to sing very small. Mr. Greenpiece, calling one day with his last and best funeral gloves on, presented her with a triangular brown box and well-thumbed blank book; and pronounced as she took them (with her best "retiring" courtesy) the following speech:

"In consideration of your superior mind and respectable character, Mrs. Naomye, you have been chosen Mite Collector of the Dorcas Society for the ensuing year."

Forgotten now were the lanterns and fiddles, the billowing skirts of Fanny and Isabella in the Dutchman's Bridal!

When the Fair again came round, Naomi's cup-cakes took the blue ribbon, and premium of a dollar and a half. Now she could say with the Psalmist:

"Gilead is mine, and Manassas is mine!"

She was retained in the responsible position of

Mite Collector for two years, and resigned it only to become President of the Dorcases.

When Mrs. Naomye went now to dances, she held her head as high and higher than the frivolous creatures who pranced about her. And if sometimes she felt a small pang, and thought:

"I wish I had a Beau for once:"

she forgot it next moment when Budsey whirled by with Fan Pouncet or Cass Lucy on his arm. To Budsey's vain sister, all the other boys in Beartown were as stars in his sunshine, or moths round his candle. "How handsome," thought Naomi, "Budsey doos look in that tabbied wescat! and I certainly admire to see his hair tufted out so behind his ears!"

CHAPTER XI

The Proud Summer Begins

THE empire of Isabella Byjam and Fanny Pouncet began to fall, as little Cassandra Lucy grew up. The thin, almost scrawny child was now a tall, pretty thing of seventeen. She was not really so handsome as Isabella or Fanny; —not very much prettier, in feature alone, than Flavia had been. Too angular as yet, with a head shaped by nature for any fashion but this of straining the hair back and gumming it into a mountain of bands, coils, and ornaments—Cassandra Lucy was, in her rare dull moments, almost plain looking. But her face lighted so quickly and so brightly, on the smallest occasions, that it almost seemed to bloom before one's eyes, like a flower opening wider. She had that peculiar bright vividness which excels beauty. It was not brightness of colour, but brightness of

look—a shining look which no one could describe. Her eyes indeed were windows illuminated from within. Perhaps the secret was that Cassandra loved companions as other persons love music and flowers. Certain it is, that under the iridescent veil of her magnetism her character was little seen. She was flighty and impulsive to the point of insincerity; very mercurial and irresponsible. In short, her nature was a shallow though an innocent one. But her manners, so animated, warm and debonair, her irresistible sweet laughter, and cloudless good nature, captivated the judgment; and in the end, like many another woman, she rose to the opinion of those who loved her best and most blindly.

Such a character was that "Cass Lucy" of whom veiled remarks began to be made behind Naomi's back in the winter of 1791, the year of Vermont's statehood.

"Budsey Polke has painted up his father's old sleigh."

"Poor Naomye—she's such a fond sister, she'll take it very hard."

"It'll be like losing an eyetooth."

Naomi's eyes were opened at a certain spelling match in April, when Budsey was one of the captains. How long she was to remember that evening! Budsey won first choice by the penny, and Mr. Tibbald, the schoolmaster, who was invariably the first one chosen, was half rising to go to Budsey's side, the banner of victory already flying in his wan countenance, when Budsey from the platform announced:

"I choose Cassandra Lucy!"

Spelling matches were taken in earnest in Beartown, and the choice of a poor speller like Cass before Mr. Tibbald was snatched up, caused looks of astonishment, and even a few faint titters. These gatherings were usually the triumph of the neglected but studious girls, and wholesome reminders to the others that turn about is fair play.

Cass walked with a pretty manner to her place beside her captain.

"Cass 'll be able to set down and rest her very soon," whispered the young people. She sat down at the very first word that was given her. It was "festival," and she spelled it as follows:

"F-e-s, fes, there's your fes; t-y, ty, there's your ty, festy; v-a-l, val, there's your val; festival."

Naomi looked away in pity. What was her surprise to hear the doomed one cheerfully adding:

"I guess in the books they spell it with two l's. Bill Byjam, you needn't to laugh. I can spell very pretty if I have the right words handed to me."

"Mistress Lucy, you're spelt daown. Will you please to be seated?"

"I'll thank you for the Boston rocker, then, William Byjam. If I'm the first one to set down, I'll take my choice o' the chairs." She sank with

a beautiful courtesy into the chair which the opposing captain set out for her.

"A curious maid is Cass Lucy," thought Naomi. "Here she's put to shame before us all, and she carries it off as if she'd spelt everybody down. Budsey's larnt a lesson—he wun't choose her again. I could have told him how she stands as a speller, if he'd asked me."

"Why, the sides hain't even!" cried one of Budsey's spellers. "Mace Paouncet, what you doin' on Bill Byjam's side? You was 'lected by Budse'."

"Bill Byjam 'lected me, by a rabbit!" cried fat Mace Pouncet.

"'Twas Budse' Polke, I tell ye!"

"I tell ye it wan't!"

Those who had been spelt down now began to urge the captains to choose all over again. Naomi urged it too, thinking that her brother's side would be stronger by one at least. At length the captains agreed to it, and the choosing began

afresh. The penny was tossed up—Saul Polke won again.

"I choose Cassandra Lucy!"

All was plain now. Naomi looked at Budsey, then at Cass, and mingled feelings crossed her mind. First she thought, "It's come to pass—my brother's in love." Then she thought, "Cass is pretty—she's pretty and sprightly, but she hain't quite good enough for my brother Budsey." Then she thought, "I feel a year or two older than I did when I put on this plum-coloured petticoat."

While she was thus musing, William Byjam called out:

"Come down out of the clouds, Mrs. Naomye! Your name's been throwed at ye twice. Can't spare such a speller as you be!"

Naomi took her place next Mr. Tibbald, near the head of her line. She spelled readily all the words that came to her; but her thoughts *would* go off wandering far into her brother's future,

and her eyes were often fixed on Cassandra Lucy until all was darkness round that bright face. This absent, intent expression which she wore became her well. Sometimes she smiled; sometimes her eyes brimmed for a moment. Sometimes her breast rose high beneath her buskboard, when her young brother spared her a look.

A tiny, cold, damp thing like the nose of a very small puppy was pushed into her hand. She started, and let it fall—a little red comfit—on the floor. Whence had it come? Fat Mace Pouncet had his back turned toward her, and was waving a peacock fan over Debbe Darby—it was not he whose offering she had spilt. Mr. Tibbald towered like a mast on the other side, his tail-buttons almost on a level with her shoulders. She stole a quick glance at him—was he blushing?

Naomi heard a titter from the opposing ranks. Elbows nudged ribs all down the line; and she caught a wise glance from Isabella Byjam.

Now she was wide awake—her dreams were

scattered. Her ready blush rose in a flood as she felt the battery of laughing eyes all turned on her and the bashful schoolmaster. She fidgeted and closed and unclosed her fingers, looked up, then down, and heard with gratitude the new word called out by Budsey:

"Prestidigitation."

The next caraway that was laid in her palm she did not drop, but softly murmured thanks for it. And then they followed fast—the green, the red, and the white caraways, as many as she could devour. When she whispered:

"Thanky,"

Mr. Tibbald would answer low:

"Welcome."

And when an uproar arose about Mace Pouncet, who would not sit down on account of a diphthong, Mr. Tibbald took advantage of it to stoop down from his tall height, and to murmur:

"Your shawl's very pretty for spring wear, Mrs. Naomye."

Naomi courtesied, with a glance at Debbe and Isabella out of the corner of her eye.

"And I like," continued Mr. Tibbald, "your hair drawed back so from your brows."

Whence came these involuntary tossings of Naomi's head, these bridlings and tiltings? In all her modest youth she had not behaved so before. Now a sprite that had dwelt unsuspected in some deep cavern of her nature—a peacock trait—came to light. She fluttered her fan, cast down her eyes, and turned her cheek over her shoulder, well aware that many were looking at her and Mr. Tibbald.

Budsey and Cass were forgotten. The tubs of snow brought from the cave in the Hollow were trundled out, the low benches set about them. A crowd of half-grown-up boys and girls hung about the kettle, "trying" the boiling sap until it was ready to candy. When at last it was poured on the snow, fragrant as ambrosia, how gallantly Mr. Tibbald forked up the sweet candy for Mrs.

Naomi! He beat off the encroaching forks of Debbe, Darby's beau on one side, and Fanny Pouncet's on the other. He chose Mrs. Naomi into the ring in the romping games of "Ruth and Jacob" and "King William Was."

It was very fine, Naomi found, to be some one's lady, and to know that she should have an escort home other than kind Captain Lucy and his wife. Though Mr. Tibbald said nothing about it, Naomi knew that he would walk home with her, and every one else knew it. "What a fine young lady I be!" thought Naomi. "I was the queen of the spell." She had hardly pinned her shawl together when Mr. Tibbald was there, offering his arm. Perhaps his thoughts were of a different sort from hers. When they were out of range of the lanterns, he pointed to the stars, which were as bright and thick as in August.

"On such a night as this," he began to recite in the excellent deep voice which issued from his lean throat as from a trumpet:

"Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew;
On such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls;
. . . On such a night
Stood Dido, with a willow in her hands,
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waved her love
To come again to Carthage!"

Naomi's breast heaved, for she had never heard words so beautifully spoken.

"O let me larn to speak that piece as you do!" she cried.

Her escort taught it to her word for word. What a strange evening this was! how like another woman she felt, as she walked hanging on Mr. Tibbald's arm! Budsey and Cass passed them, and threw back a glance or two. Naomi had never been so much "agog" before; and yet what tiny smart was this in her breast? What cold voice in her ear, bidding her beware the primrose path?

CHAPTER XII

Advice from Marm and Mrs. Darby

AT breakfast the next morning Marm said:

"I hear you catched a beau at the doin'sh, Naomye."

Yesterday Naomi might have replied to this question only by an uncomfortable little grin; but to-day in her new-found pride she answered coldly:

"Catching a beau is work I never learned to do, Marm Patridge."

"Oh, wal, shomebody fetched ye hum, didn't they?"

"Yes, Marm."

"Who wash it, hey? Billy Byjam?"

"No, Marm."

Marm looked shrewdly at Naomi's red cheeks.

"Did that Hen Tibbald git up courage enough to shee you hum?"

"Yes, Marm."

"Oh!"

Nothing more was said about beaux that day; and Naomi, with her proud thoughts all to herself, finished her work and retrimmed her Sabbath bonnet.

When Sunday evening came, Marm casually inquired:

"Your beau comin' round to-night, Naomye?"

"My which, Marm Patridge?"

"Your beau, Hen Tibbald."

"I didn't know as I had any beau *Mister* Tibbald."

"Oh, wal! Air you expectin' company to-night?"

"No, Marm, I hain't!"

"What you got on thoshe green ear-ringsh for, then—hey?"

Mr. Tibbald came to call on that evening.

He came on many an evening after that, and faces ceased to leap into the windows of houses

along the road when his semi-clerical coat-tails passed. It was soon well known as far as Jamaica and even Tempe, that Mrs. Naomi Polke, that settled person, had a beau. She became about four times prettier, and six times more important, in everybody's estimation. She was really prettier to look at, for Marm now fished out, without reserve, all the dainties of her cedar chest—the lace cape, the English fan, the wax roses, and the beaded pocket. She would climb the ladder, groaning, on a Wednesday or a Sunday afternoon, and pinch and pat Naomi's dress, to make it "set" better, putting a pin here and a pin there, until a new neatness and snugness was achieved in the old blue basque. Sometimes she even tweaked the red-chestnut hair into curl with the hot scissors, while she advised her victim to suffer all these things in patience.

"I knowed of a woman older than you be," Marm would say, "that up and buyed hershelf (or it wash given to her) a comb with three cherriesh

on top of it, and she wash married to a widower within a year!"

The best thing about Mr. Tibbald was the abundance of poetry which he knew. Most of it, to be sure, was of a serious cast, but he recited it well, and Naomi loved to hear him. As the fine lines of Dryden or of Pope unrolled, the gate to the enchanted lands flew open again on its scarcely rusted hinges, and the very trees seemed to dance in the woods.

In all this, it is true, there was something very much amiss, and an inward voice remonstrating, to which she tried in vain to turn a deaf ear. Sometimes when Mr. Tibbald would persist in talking of himself and herself, in a voice deeper than ordinary, with long pauses, she saw plainly enough that she was playing with something much too good for her to touch. Once when he found her paring apples, he made so bold as to take the pan out of her hands, and to remind her that she had "company to entertain."

"What shall I do to entertain my company?" Naomi asked.

"You may talk, if you please."

"Couldn't you tell me some more of that Belinda piece?"

"W-wal, I'd sooner hear your voice, Mrs. Naomye."

"What would I talk about?"

"W-wal, you might talk about *me*."

"What would I say?"

"You might say—you might say I was a somewhat larned man."

"Oh, yes, I could say that, certain! That's very true indeed."

"You might say whether I was an important man in the community."

"Oh, you certainly air that! You're very large potatoes in the town."

But she did not think of saying, as Mr. Tibbald had hoped in the secret depths of his bosom, that he was a handsome man, or a reckless rider.

And still she tried to muffle the reproaches of the honest woman in her heart, with the old excuse:

"How can I tell Mr. Tibbald that I don't love him, before he asks me?"

It sounded very maidenly, and was really a puzzling question.

Thus the golden days slipped along, and each cast its faint shade of change over Naomi's countenance, covering its plain, transparent look with a fine, bright veil of satisfied vanity. Only a shrewd observer could have seen, at first, the speck of trouble in the lowest depths of her eyes. Its shadow was no larger than the point of a pin in the early summer; but every time that any one spoke to her of Mr. Tibbald, the trouble expanded over her face, and made two deep perpendicular wrinkles in her forehead.

Mr. Polke, who had grown much older to look at than Marm Patridge, and who sat all day waiting as it were to get back to his bed, took but little

notice of the affairs of his children. Since that overwhelming day when the news of the end of the war had come, and every window in Beartown was hung with black, Mr. Polke neither played on his old flute, nor sang "King Hancock Sat," or "Hunting Shirts and Rifle Guns," or any other of the old Loyalist songs. He no longer cared to see Budsey do the sword-exercise. Sometimes he still talked to himself, when he was alone, about the characters and prospects of his children, but in these musings he now often included Charles, Joseph and Abigail, his married children, and all the little ones who had died in childhood. Then he would pull himself up with a start, and begin again, and again forget which children were married, and which had died.

Marm took her work, and double-barrelled spectacles, and sat down by him one afternoon, to discuss Naomi's affair.

"What do you think, Richard, of thish beau of Naomye'sh?"

"Naomye—the little one—has she got a beau, hey?" inquired Mr. Polke, turning round slowly from his blind contemplation of the cornfields.

"Hash she! wal, I guesh. A good match for the child. It'sh that Henry Tibbald, nevew."

"Oh—Tibbald? I've seen her setting on the bench under the popple tree with some young man or another. Tibbald, hey? Why, he's too old for the little maouse, hain't he?"

"Why, no, Richard—he'sh a very shootable age."

"Haow can you say so, Marm? he's older than I be. He was the host of the Bridle when I was a young man."

"Why, Richard, man alive, that wash the father —that wan't thish young Henry!"

"Oh, the father, was it? Wal, wal! Time flies, however we may think it creeps from day to day."

"Wal, Richard, what would you think of thish young Henry for Naomye, hey?"

"I don't know the young man, Marm. I hope he's a good loyalist, and hain't afeared of work, and 's in his place in the church on Sabbath mornings. Doos the little maouse take a shine to him, do you think, Marm?"

"She'll do ash she'sh told, I hope!"

"Why, Marm, she better choose of her own free will. Her mother and I did so. I can leave the child a roof over her head—she's no need to wed for a home. I've had it in mind a long while to bequeath her poor Sarey's place on the north turnpike, that *she* had from *her* father. You can tell her that, Marm, and then she'll feel free to choose this Tibbald or no—though he seems to me a long sight too old for her," concluded Mr. Polke, relapsing into his absent gaze over the cornfields, and merging Henry Tibbald again into his father, the host of the old Bridle Tavern.

"I shan't tell the child of that housh on the north turnpike," said Marm to herself. "She'sh too backward for her own good ash it ish."

To herself Marm might speak so; but in a moment of family pride she mentioned to her niece Mrs. Darby that Naomi had no need to marry unless she chose—she had a father who could provide for her. Mrs. Darby said that she should keep any such bee as that out of Naomi's bonnet, if *she* were looking after the child. She added:

"I shall give her very different counsel if she comes to me, you may be sure, Marm."

She made an opportunity to do so, on the next day when Naomi went to see Pleiades.

William French would not have known his intended if he could have seen her now. Pleiades Darby was a confirmed cataleptic. She sat or stood for hours perfectly motionless, with her large eyes wide open—an uncounted martyr of the Revolution. The Beartown children ran past the tollgate house with fearful looks backward, and told ghoulish stories of the poor woman inside. But on this day Naomi found her asleep, and Mrs. Darby appropriated the call.

"Why don't you fetch your beau," she inquired, "to visit your aunt and cousins?"

Naomi said nothing, but fanned herself and let her aunt's question fill the room with its echoes.

"You're going to buy you a new bunnit, your Marm says."

"Oh, yis, Aunt, a blue one, I think, to go with my muslin."

"I s'pose she wants it for you to appear out in?"

The perpendicular wrinkles began to show in Naomi's forehead.

"No, Marm, no such a thing," she replied.

"That's pretty talk, when you're keepin' company as fast as you can with Henry Tibbald."

"I bid ye good-day, Aunt Darby."

"Set still, Saucebox. *I* wun't ask ye no questions—I know enough already. I guess you can hark to the only aunt you've got on Bald Mountin'. You was always a curious young one, singing sams to yourself, and forgetting what

you'd gone for, and who'd sent ye. *I* recomember when you went to church with one white and one red stockin' on. I recomember what you did at Hester Paouncet's weddin' too, when you flyed off daown cellar to fetch some more cider—drawed a gallon of vinegar and served it to half the company before you was ketched at it. And it's just so with you naow. Here's a stiddy young man, that would make ye a good husband —but no! You've had a dream, or seen a maouse, or read a verse in the Bible, that's turned ye against him. Your father's sisters did so, two of 'em, Eliza and Louisa. They never had but the one chance apiece."

Naomi never had a worse faceburn than during this speech. Her cheeks grew hotter and hotter until they were almost purple under the scourge. Her aunt, however, paused at last, and leaning back in her chair, said:

"But naow I've done my duty by ye, I shall say no more. You'll do as you please, I s'pose. I've

got girls of my own, and enough to think of about 'em.—No, Pleiades hain't any better. I did think yesterday she showed a little more life. I thought I heared her cluckin' to the chickens.—No, Debbe hain't to home. I send her aout all I can."

"Has Debbe begun her new Sabbath dress?" asked Naomi, whose cheeks were cooling off now.

"She's got it basted together. I don't like this new fashion for the sleeves. Flowin' sleeves they call 'em, and they dip in your tea and sauce every time you come to the board."

"It sounds like a pretty fashion," said Naomi.

"Pretty enough. The old was full as pretty."

Naomi thought seriously enough of her future as she walked home from the tollgate that afternoon. What if she never told Henry Tibbald how it was with her? On that side, her elders said, stretched the broad highway of comfort and pleasure, and on the other a narrow path of briers. But as she turned in between the poplars, she saw

Budsey and Cass walking across fields to the Hollow, holding hands; and suddenly she felt very old, and very worldly-wise. She laid her head down on top of the gate post, and cried for a long time.

She was crying there when Marm Patridge threw open the door and called out in a dreadful voice:

"Come in here, Naomye! Your father'sh fell in a fit on the floor—he'sh turning blue, and hish eyesh have rolled back in hish head!"

CHAPTER XIII

Driving to Westminster

MR. POLKE lay on his bed, breathing hard, for a week and a day. Naomi could not look at him without weeping; and even Budsey, whose nerves were strong, turned away from that dreadful sight. Mr. Polke's eyes were rolled back until only the whites of them showed. His legs and arms were rigid, his poor choked throat displayed its swollen veins above his open shirt. The old doctor from Westminster met the Beartown doctor at his bedside. They bled him; concocted plasters and poultices; bled him again; and gave him strong cherry bounce; and bled him yet once more. The swollen veins relaxed, and Naomi blessed the doctors, and looked on hopefully while they cupped the very life-blood from her father's heart. He grew fainter, weaker, peacefuller, until his eyelids fluttered down over his

dreadful white eyes; and then he drew a few slow breaths, with long pauses between; and three times they thought that he had ceased to breathe. And then he did cease; and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, that stillness fell over the house behind the poplars which had not fallen over it since Naomi was nine years old.

How small now looked her former troubles and perplexities to her! They dwindled away into midges. She forgot Mr. Tibbald, and his calls, and Marm's worrying advice, and her aunt Darby's. When the moonlight was creeping from rafter to rafter across the garret, the reproach of many generations awoke in her heart:

"Oh, I wish I had been kinder to father! I might have mended him better—I might have taken a thousand more stitches for him—but it's too late now!"

Marm herself was very sad, but she grieved more for Naomi when she saw the bloom being

washed out of her eyes, and the self-reproachful droop of her mouth. She noted with consternation the long silences in Mr. Tibbald's calls, when Naomi sat with her glance averted, and her fingers absently playing. A new bonnet, Marm thought, would be a good remedy, perhaps the best, for these sad looks. Her close black one should be discarded after four weeks, Marm said, and she should have a silvery poke with a white flower.

Naomi clung to the close black bonnet, but Marm was very firm. She might wear her black dress all summer, if she chose. But the black bonnet was too sad, too aged and forlorn. "It makesh her more backward than ever," said Marm. "If I do my duty by Richard Polke, now he'sh dead and gone, I shall buy a new bunnit for hish darter. Young men have roving eyesh, and Henry Tibbald may be looking away from our Naomye, if we don't shee to it."

Naomi was wandering up the Branch one after-

noon, at about the hour when the wood-insects all come out and dance and whirl in the air. It was a favourite hour to Naomi, and she felt, for the first time since her sorrow, a faint call from the pleasures of life. They called her as if from far away. Their voice was sweet in the ears of healthy youth, and comforting to youth's poignant loneliness. They called faintly from the recesses of the woods:

"You'll be happy again!—you'll be happy again!—you'll see!"

"How can I be happy, when I'm so lonely for father?"

The voices called in a twittering tone:

"Life is sweet! short and sweet!"

"Oh, no!" thought Naomi. "Life isn't short at all. I shall live to be an old woman; and never see father till I die."

But the twittering went on, and the insects danced in the level rays, as the sun "drew water" over Red Mountain's brow. Nature's kind nurs-

ing was easing Naomi's first sorrow, despite the tears which dropped on the tall ferns where she walked.

While she was walking along, and hearing youth's voices call her from invisible distances, Marm Patridge was sitting in the kitchen crooking unwonted fingers round a pen. She was writing to Mrs. Nabby Waterford in Grant 17 of Jamaica township, setting a day for Mrs. Nabby to come and take her young sister to Westminster and buy her a new bonnet.

"Ye child has No Taiste in Sch matters," wrote Marm, "& yett as I toald you tis Importnt She shd have ye Bunnet. Doe like a good Sistr come a-Satterday morng & fetch ye child down to Wminster & as you Drive along you can speak a word or 2 in season to ye child She is too Backard by far."

On the Saturday like a good sister Mrs. Nabby came, and Naomi was pushed into the old yellow buckboard to go a-bonneting. Nabby Waterford had left off her own mourning, and was wearing again the gay, if unfashionable, large bonnet and

greenish brown mantilla which, with care, had lasted her these eleven years. Naomi might have seen much more of this sister with no disadvantage to herself. Abigail Waterford was a wholesome, kind, practical, cheerful creature, "full of wise saws." She eyed her silent young sister for some time without saying anything; and then she said with startling calmness:

"This bunnit you buy to-day wun't do to be married in."

Naomi started, and turned and stared into the sumach bushes.

"I told you you'd ketch a beau at one of these spellin' matches," her sister continued.

"Nabby!"

"What say?"

"I don't care to have you talk on that subject."

"Why, Naomye, we've all got to go on living, and gitting married, when the time comes, though our father and mother air both gone. They did

so in their day; and their fathers and mothers did so in *their* day."

"But I don't think I shall ever be married, Nabby."

"Why, what's the trouble with you, little sister?"

"I don't know, Nab. I hain't been very happy about Mr. Tibbald all summer."

"Why, when I was here in May, I thought you seemed very well pleased with his visits."

"So I was pleased; but I wan't happy."

"That sounds very whimsey," said Abigail, shaking her head. "You was pleased; but you wan't happy. I guess you've got some other young man in your eye," she added, taking a long look at her sister. Naomi as steadily returned the gaze. There was no shadow of any young man in her eyes, unless it were the unsubstantial shadow of a man of dreams and romances.

The silence between the sisters continued for some time. They had reached the last and

steepest waterbars. The spire and roofs of Westminster, and its small dark blue lake, began to show between the trees ahead.

"What ails you at little Henry Tibbald, Naomye? Wal, he was little when I knowed him. What fault do you find in him, hey?"

"I don't find any fault with him, Nabby. All the fault I find's with Naomye Polke. *She's* to blame. She's a callous thing—she can't make herself care about him."

"He's a good upright man, they all say."

"Oh, yes—very respectable."

"He hain't, to be sure, as handsome as some," conceded Mrs. Waterford. "He's somewhat spindlin'."

Naomi said nothing.

"He's a timid, narvous, book-readin' man—is that what ails you at him?"

Naomi shook her head impatiently, but her eyes were full of tears. Why could not Abigail understand?

"Hain't he gentle with ye? Hain't he kind?" persisted Abigail.

"Oh, yes—he's kind—he's gentle—don't ask me any more, Nabby, please. You worrit me—I can't make you understand."

"If there was a novil or a romance in the haouse, I should be afeared you'd be'n dipping into it!" cried Abigail. She added her favourite proverb, in a somewhat pensive tone—

"Time's the rider that breaks youth in."

They reached Westminster, and the bonnet, a pretty thing of grey braids, with a white chicken pompon, was bought. A few calls made, they set out for home. The shadows began to lengthen, the birds to call in the woods. Both sisters were thinking of the same thing. At length Abigail said musingly:

"Young maids have curious fancies. I had, I recollect. You see, Naomye, we mustn't give ear to every whim that hops into our heads. We

must larn wisdom, as the Book says, and ketch hold of understanding.

"Naow we should be sorry to have you an old maid, Naomye. Your father would have be'n sorry." She paused, as she saw Naomi's eyes quite brim over.

"Poor Marm," she continued thoughtfully. "She'll grieve a great deal about this, if you carry out as you've begun. It wun't take much, at her age——" Naomi was very much touched, and stole a side glance at her sister; but she thought she saw a tiny self-congratulatory smile play round Abigail's mouth, and something shut up quickly in her breast. She almost heard it click. Nabby might have heard it too, for she went on in a different strain:

"Naow here's a young man's picked you aout of all the maids in Beartown. He's passed by Emily Byjam, and Isabella Byjam, and Fan Pouncet, to take up with you." Naomi could not help a small, pleased smile at this. "And if you

like, you may have a home, and husband, and childern, like other women;—everything to make life pleasant to you.

"But if you're an old maid, you'll grow very peppery and spiteful; you'll be very saving and close, likely; you'll be looked down upon, and the childern 'll run after ye and holler at ye in the streets. You don't think of that, 'tain't likely; but it's a sad life an old maid leads. She's nobody and nothing."

Naomi was studiously looking at the tumbling falls of the Branch. Abigail went on:

"Think of Mr. Byjam's wife's aunt—what kind of a life doos she lead, hey?" Naomi did think of her, and conjured up before her mind's eye the bald capless head, pale sunken eyes, attenuated figure, wispy bonnet strings and moth-eaten shawl of Mr. Byjam's household drudge. Abigail looked, and saw that picture in her young sister's eyes. She pressed the contrast home.

"So we want to have a new bunnit for you,

little sister, and to have you take your chance and be happy. 'The things a man feared air often better than those he prayed for.' You may believe it's better to be married than single, even if you don't feel that you could never have wed any but this one. Many a woman's married that way, and 's glad she did."

"I hope," said Naomi, "none of *my* sisters or brothers married that way." Abigail's brown cheek flushed. Naomi was sorry to have run the risk of wounding her. She put her hand out timidly toward Abigail's. "I don't think *you* did so, Nabby," said she. Abigail did not speak for a long time. At last she said with some constraint:

"I wun't purtend to caounsil you against your own judgment, little sister. Do what you think's right; you wun't be punished for that."

"Nabby, don't you believe it's true that people fall in love? It must have happened to poor Mr. Tibbald, else why should he pick me out, when

I'm not half so pretty as some on the mountain?"

"Wal—but you're a very good speller."

"The more I think and ponder, the more perplexed I be, Nabby."

Abigail shook her head.

"You cultivate these whimseys, I'm afeared, little sister!"

"Hark!" said Naomi, putting her hand up to her ear.

A fine thread of a voice which had once been sweet was singing at Mr. Byjam's back chamber window. A head looked out. It was the bald, capless poll of the old maiden drudge, "Mrs." Maria. The sun was in her eyes, but she was not frowning either at it or at her toilsome needle, as she sang away cheerfully:

"The next that came a-courtin' was young Ellis Gove:
I met him first with a joyful love;
With a joyful love how could I be afraid?
The good wine needs no bush, 'tis said.
Timei, timeum, pata."

CHAPTER XIV

The Cradle in the Woodhouse Chamber

Yea, even mine own familiar friend, whom I trusted!

SOMETIMES in these days Naomi said to herself, "Now I see how it was with poor Flavia." It was her turn now to feel the opinions of her family flowing like a strong current round her feet, and carrying her down the stream of average conduct. More and more frail and intermittent became the tiny cords of instinct and of conscience pulling back against the stream.

And yet they pulled her back. Shadowy friends and helpers were with her in the contest. Alpheus and Maryette, those somewhat wooden and impossible lovers, were on her side, and so were those faint and scarcely remembered dreams which only left a vague glow and freshness in her mind on awaking, like the thirsty traveller's dream of a spring. Even the Bible seemed to her

troubled mind, as she searched it, a storehouse of personal advice to her. When St. Paul said:

"Take the whole armour of righteousness, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day," Naomi understood that she was to fortify herself with texts and perhaps with fasting, in order to withstand Nabby, Marm, and the rest in the evil day of Mr. Tibbald's proposal; and when the parable of the Rich Young Man closed with the remark:

"And he went away sorrowful, because he had get possessions," Naomi said to herself, "So be I sorrowful, because I possess a beau."

"Why couldn't he fall in love with Emily Byjam?" she thought fretfully. "She's as good a speller as I be, and has a better countenance—not a freckle to her face. But that's the worst of falling in love. People in love don't change; their hearts air fixed on *that* one for life," concluded this wise woman.

But there was another hope at the back of Na-

omi's mind, and in the bottom of her heart. That hope was Budsey,—a real knight and champion, better than any beings in books. Budsey had not told her what forlorn creatures old maids were. He had not warned her that this would probably prove her only offer of marriage. It was not Budsey who had talked about a new bonnet, and a toilet water for freckles—no; the women of the family had done all these things. "Budsey," said Naomi to herself, "has held his tongue and pitied me."

To be sure, Budsey's own affairs were very engrossing. By Mr. Polke's will, the farm was his, but he must give a home to Marm as long as she lived, and to Naomi unless she preferred the place on the north turnpike. Budsey had built an ashery, and a sawmill on the edge of the woods. He was as capable a farmer as his father had been remiss and visionary. Busy as he was all day in the fields and woods, and spending seven long evenings a week at his lady's, Naomi had not seen

much of him. But his darling image was always in the back of her mind, and no picture of the future, dark or bright, was without the unspoken thought, "Budsey will take my part."

The asters had withered, the woods had turned and begun to fall. The mountains began to show the winter afterglow, maroon and purple lakes in their hollows. This was Naomi's darling season. No perplexity or trouble could quite destroy its pleasure to her. Her nerves were steady and quiet, and she could sometimes forget the worrying Day ahead.

"Naomye, I want you should take this measure up to the woodhouse chamber and shuck it full of but'nut meats for my suet-cake," said Marm on one of these early October mornings. Naomi was not sorry to have an errand into the dark mysterious woodhouse chamber. She had not been there for months. It was the true garret of the house,—full of the cracked china, broken furniture, old gazettes, and moth-eaten dresses

and shawls which Marm could not endure to throw away. These musty treasures, detailed histories of bygone days, lay piled all round the kegs of old black butternuts which buttressed the chimney. Naomi crept along the low-ceiled attic, afraid of routing the wasps from their paper domes overhead, until she reached the dormer, and tipped over a keg of butternuts in her apron.

At first the black shells flew fast all over the woodhouse chamber. Bees came in, explored the beams, and buzzed out again into the sunshine. The branches of the wine-glass elm made a tremulous dapple on the floor. The sweet air of the morning flowed in and made her imperceptibly slacken her loud hammer. All this energy was out of tune with the soft still weather. "Cheep, cheep," sang the autumn swallows in the elm. She stopped cracking and looked out.

The fair-weather mist had rolled away, leaving diamond webs all over the grass, as if for fairy bridals. The old pointer sniffed at the cheeping

swallows from where he lay on the grass. Mr. Byjam drove away to the cider mill in a cart of apples, his little grandchild sitting in the back, bareheaded to the breeze and sun.

"I wish," said Naomi to herself, "I was as young as Harriet Byjam's child."

She took up a nut, but forgot to crack it.

"I wish I was a child again, and father was alive, and my path ran down with butter and honey."

The swallows cheeped, the school-bell rang, and Martha Pouncet came down the hill with buckets to the spring.

"Everybody," thought Naomi, "is settled and contented in their minds but me." She drew a long sigh, and gazed about the woodhouse chamber.

"Nabby said to take warning by Mrs. Maria, but I think she's happier than poor I be. Marm and Nabby and Aunt Darby all seem to think alike. I see now how poor Flavia was over-

borne, and persuaded to marry Mr. Snodgrass. And she was young and tender, whereas I'm quite old and tough. And yet it hain't very easy for me to choose——

"On one side, here's comfort, and pleasing the family, and being respected in the community, and having a man to look after me." She paused a long time over this picture. "It's a great thing to be wedded, everybody says, and very likely they're right. On the other side, what would I find to comfort me for being an old maid like Mrs. Maria? Wal, I should have Budsey and his childern. But they say that wun't content me. Oh! what's that?"

The breeze blew in and began to rock the little old cradle with the carved hood, which stood in the corner. It rocked as softly as if there were a baby in it. And as Naomi looked, there seemed to be a baby in the cradle—a young maiden's dream baby—her own. How strangely it frightened her! She drew a long and trembling

breath. The wind died away, and the cradle was still.

"I will never marry Mr. Tibbald," said Naomi aloud, taking up her hammer again. "I choose to be like Mrs. Maria."

"Hi, sister slowcoach!"

The door below opened, and Budsey came up with long leaps. He had Marm's large apron tied round his neck, and a flatiron in each hand. He came leapfrog over the chests and baskets of ragged keepsakes, bumping with his shoulders the pendent paper castles of the wasps.

"Is that all you've shucked, ye snail?" He skimmed Naomi's peck measure up to the ceiling without spilling a butternut. He whistled and cracked and flung his shells into the farthest corners. When bees flew in, he beat at them with his flatiron, and shouted:

"Aha, Mr. Bumble! I had ye then in the small of your back!"

Naomi laughed at all he said and did. To her

his monkey-shines were very clever and charming. He brought the wholesomest mountain breezes wherever he came; they blew round her with refreshing coolness.

"You're very cocky to-day, Budsey."

"I'll tell ye something, sister."

"What is it? I'm all agog to hear."

"Wal—Cassie and I air going to appear out this Sabbath."

"Oh, Budsey!"

"Yes, marm. She's got her bunnit trimmed, and her mantilly."

"Wal, wal! You hain't little Budsey any more, be you? You're Master Saul Polke—Miss Cass Lucy's husband to be."

Budsey said nothing, but swelled out his chest, and his speaking eyes looked up the pike toward the church.

"But I hain't as happy as you be, Budsey."

"What say? What's the trouble, sister?"

"Why, Budsey, Marm and Nabby want I should—want I should——"

"Hey?"

"Why, they all think—think it would be very foolish of me, if anybody—if anybody ever asked me to marry 'em, and I should say no to 'em."

Budsey was silent.

"But I can't feel to say yes."

Budsey was silent still.

"P'haps after all he wun't ask me," said Naomi with a little nervous laugh. "That would be the best way out of the tangle. For I don't feel *that way*."

"What way?"

"Why, the way you and Cassie feel."

Budsey smiled, the superior smile of a young man in love. He knew that no one ever had felt, or ever could feel, as *he* did.

"Hen Tibbald," he said, "is a very respectable man."

Naomi listened with a beating heart.

"I think he'd make you a good husband."

"Oh, Budsey!"

"You bètter look at it from all sides," continued young Saul. "You know you hain't as young as you once was."

("No! not as young as Cassie!")

"A good many would give a good deal for your chance."

"I wish they had it, then—they'd be *very* welcome."

"Why, Naomye, don't you think you can be happy with poor Hen?"

"Budsey!"

"What say?"

"I thought you was in love—and I thought you'd see how it is with me, and be sorry for me——"

"Don't cry, Naomye!"

"I w-will cry! I'm very mis'able—anybody would pity me if they knowed . . . if they knowed how sorry I be that I ever had a b-beau!"

"Don't cry—please don't cry, Naomye."

"I thought you'd tell me not to wed him unless I felt *that way*——"

Budsey patted Naomi's shoulder in silence for a while. She looked at him once or twice through a tear's magnifying lens, and his countenance was good and brotherly in her eyes. There was no tiny smirk there such as she had thought she saw in Nabby's eyes when they were driving to Westminster and talking of this matter. At length Budsey said:

"I'm sorry for you, Naomye, and I wish it was somebody you could be fond of, instead of poor Hen. But there's a great deal for you to think of. It hain't best for a young woman to stay single. Your father hain't alive to know of it, but you'd like to do what would have pleased him," said Budsey very gently and kindly. "You'd like to make him happy if you could; wouldn't you?"

"Yes," said Naomi in a tiny voice.

"And then there's Marm. She's be'n a pretty

good parent to all of us childern. You'd like to please her too."

"Yes——" said Naomi, thinking, "I've heared this once or twice before."

"And p'haps," said Budsey, "you'd like to please me."

Naomi cried, as softly as she could, into her lap. Her knight and defender, then, was on the other side. Budsey was not going to take her part. She felt a grief beyond her own, and a chilly wind blew in through the elm's branches.

"Budsey! how would you like it, if you was told to marry Fanny Paouncet instead of Cass?"

"Is there somebody you're fond of, then, Naomye?"

"No—no—there hain't anybody," said Naomi weakly.

Budsey was silent for a while.

"Then I think, Naomye, you'd better try to grow fond of poor Hen. I shall be sorry if you feel that you must turn him away."

"Budsey, look—look at the cradle! It's rocking again!"

"What of that? Hain't anything but the wind."

"It's a sign to me! It's a sign, I tell ye!"

"Foolishness, Naomye."

"I tell ye it's a sign to me, that I should follow my own feelings, and say No to Mr. Tibbald."

"I should think a cradle rocking would be a sign to you to say Yes to poor Hen, Naomye. I should think it would be a sign to you that you'd find comfort in your childern, if you didn't in your husband. I should think it would make you afeared to be a childless woman——"

"I could love and do for your childern, yours and Cassie's."

"You ought to have a cradle of your own, sister."

Naomi knew better. She knew that the imaginary baby in the cradle was the child of love. But she was very weary of the struggle. The

current was very strong, and Budsey had not taken her part. She surrendered to the stream. Let it carry her away, then, to the sea. There was a sort of peace in yielding. She turned her back on the cradle, which was still rocking in the wind.

She said to herself, "I was mistaken in thinking I knew before how it was with Flavia; but now I know."

CHAPTER XV

Eliza's Visit

We twa hae paidlet in the burn
From morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roared
Sin auld lang syne.

ON her wedding morning Eliza Polke had said to herself the prophetic words, "Shall I be a roving woman without a home?" Even such had her life been; nine roving years without a home. The restlessness of Frederick Dukes was beyond cure. How many a morning had Eliza risen in the misty dawn, and dressed her sleepy children, and stowed away her battered household goods in a wagon, and travelled all day to what she often hoped might be a home indeed, only to leave it the next spring or fall to jog away to another township. Her children were all born in different towns and baptised in different churches; some were baptised Episcopalians,

some Congregationalists, and some Baptists. Eliza Dukes never had real neighbours. Her husband never held a town office; he was never even a fence-viewer. There was but little money in the purse; and when by good luck or good management there was an extra sum, Frederick Dukes would buy a horse, and begin an endless chain of horse-trading. This insidious vice had grown upon him until his stable was full of four-footed speculations which he was trying to fatten, or to cure of spavins or proud feet, and to sell at an advantage.

Such was the outside view of this travel-worn family. Their townspeople shook their heads and pitied Mrs. Dukes, and supposed that she wished she had never seen her shiftless husband. Sometimes they met the family out walking on a Sunday afternoon, and seeing the wife hanging on her husband's arm, and the children playing round them, wondered, "*Can* she be happy after all, in her own way?" The ways of Providence

are past finding out. This shifting life: these children and cares; this husband to stand by when he had little standing among his acquaintances, agreed well with that hidden self in Eliza which time had brought to birth. Marriage had done as much for her husband. At times he drank too much; he was sometimes rough-spoken; but he was more to be trusted than before. His burdens were his best blessing. While they aged and weighed him down, they steadied him along the narrow way.

When Eliza was almost thirty, and looked about forty-five, her husband's innumerable movings brought her back from Maine, where they had wandered for a year or two, to Westminster. She thought at first, with somewhat calloused memories, that she would not care to go up the mountain to see her old home, or her brothers and sisters who still lived in the tollgate town. By hearsay she knew most of the events that had befallen them. She knew of Saul's betrothal, and

faint rumours had reached her that Naomi had an admirer. These matters did not touch her heart, but when she heard of her father's death she shed many, and some bitter, tears. She saw him now as she had been too blind to see him in the old days, as the most loving father in Beartown; and waked up at night by her croupy or teething little ones, she often found some wistful dream still clinging about her, of sitting on her father's knee again, while he smoothed her low-growing hair back from her forehead. She began to ruminate with softer eyes as she looked northward from Westminster. All must be much changed up there. She was herself much changed, and perhaps nobody behind the poplars would know her if she appeared there. Perhaps if she were recognised she would not be any too welcome, she thought. It was a long, long time since she had fled away on the white mare. Thus she meditated at first, as she looked up from her work, and saw the tiny houses embosomed in

trees, in the mountain hollow. "Naomye may come and see me and the childern—p'haps she will when she knows I'm settled here. If she doosn't, it's because she's forgotten her sister." But soon the grass-grown track winding upward, which she saw from her kitchen window all day long, began to call and beckon to her. When the third Saturday came, she asked her husband to harness one of his trading horses and drive her up the mountain. They slowly climbed the brown grassy track which she remembered so well, across the twenty-odd waterbars, by Tipping Rock, and the bridge over the Branch falls, until at last they came in sight of the spindling poplars. Eliza clutched her husband's arm, with cheeks as white as chalk. She had not supposed she cared so much as this!

Naomi sat looking over her piece-bags, all alone, in the side doorway, while the sound of wheels creaked in her ears; but absent-minded as ever, she did not hear them. She was absorbed

in the engrossing task of young women—in exchanging her own ideals and hopes for those which her relations preferred for her. She forgot her actual piece-bags spilling their variegated colours on the floor, in the allegorical pieces which she was fitting together in her mind; picking out every bright morsel of comfort, and every strong morsel of common sense, in her situation, and trying to piece them together into a stout serviceable garment for lifelong wear. It was a work of time.

"I've made up my mind now, and all there is left to do is to say yes to Mr. Tibbald when he asks me. It's best that I should take him, and I hain't going to repine. Everybody says I shall be happy when I'm wedded to him. I'm so old now, it hain't likely I shall ever fall in love. The pleasantest thing about it is, that it pleases Marm and Budsey. Then there's having a home of my own, that they all make so much of when they counsel me about it. Wal, I might go and live in

the house father left me, on the north turnpike; but I should have to live there alone. Wal, *'tis* a pleasant thought, and doos help to make marriage look brighter, to think I shall be able to shift the counterpanes as often as I please, and use my best dishes every day. A woman stands better in the community, they say, if she has a husband to show for herself. I don't know about that. I've be'n President of the Dorcases for two years, and Mite Collector before that; and I took the blue ribbon with my cupcakes to the Valley Fair. But then they say—look at poor Mrs. Maria! Wal, but Budsey would never make a drudge of *me*. He ain't that kind of a brother. When all's said and done, *O how I wish I could be an old maid, and live with Budsey and Cass*——"

A shadow darkened the doorway, and Naomi turned and saw her sister.

"Elizy Polke, can this be you?"

"I guess 'tis, Naomye."

The sisters embraced, and then stood apart, drinking in each other's lineaments.

"Wal! you hain't changed much since you was little Naomye," said Eliza.

"You hain't changed much either, sister," Naomi replied in her loving-kindness; but she had never seen any one so changed as Eliza Dukes. This faded woman, with her loose-jointed figure dressed without pains or pride, with her wisps of grey hair, the crows' feet round her eyes, and such a patient mouth—a mouth made over, entirely altered—this woman Eliza? Naomi was painfully conscious of the contrast which she made, with her blooming cheeks and comely stout figure; and in her sisterly heart she wished it were otherwise.

Eliza stood gazing at Naomi, and the words which she next said were even more unlike her former self than her faded cheeks and homely dress.

"Haow the wheels go raound! time was when

I thought I was far away the prettiest of us two; and here you're far away the prettiest of us naow."

"Oh, sister, you look pretty enough to me!" cried Naomi.

"I hain't pretty any more," said Eliza calmly. "But you're very pretty, Naomye. P'haps you always was, but I was too feather-headed to see it. Wal, let's hope we can both be happy, if we can't both be pretty. Oh!" She had caught sight of the wooden portrait which the journeyman artist had made of Budsey the week before.

"Ah!" cried Naomi, following her sister's eyes. "That's little Budsey in his appearing-out clothes! You'd scarcely know Budsey, he's growed so. But his hair's the same handsome colour it used to be, and his teeth air as fine and even as the pebble ones they sell ye to Boston. He's a proper tall young man too, I can tell ye!"

"Betrothed, I hear," put in Eliza.

"Oh, yes, to little Cassie Lucy. They're goin'

to appear out to-morrow. Budsey's got a purple-faced suit. I tell ye what, Elizy, if you'll come upstairs I'll show it to ye—the handsomest thing——"

"I guess I'll set here and visit awhile with you, Naomye, first."

"Wal, you'll want to hear about Budsey. He was the smartest scholar to winter school before he left. To one match he spelt everybody down but Mr. . . . Mr. Tibbald. What do you think of that, hey?"

"Mr. Tibbald?" queried Eliza.

"Why, yes, sister. Hen Tibbald we used to call him before he took up the school."

"I remember Hen Tibbald. Hain't he bald yet? His hair was always as thin as nettin'."

"Why, no, sister, he hain't—he hain't bald," said Naomi in a very troubled voice, with trembling lips.

But Eliza's mind had wandered off the thin-haired schoolmaster. She thought it very strange

that Naomi had not inquired yet about her children. She said:

"I wish I had fetched up my little Sim to show you, Naomye."

"Oh, Elizy, how many childern have you got?" cried Naomi, eager to atone for not having asked before. "How many air boys? How old be they? I'm all agog to know."

"Why, Sim's the oldest, and then there's Jim—talk of spelling! they're the best spellers I ever knowed of for their ages. Sim was a forward young one from the beginning. I do wish I'd fetched him up to show ye! Hain't had the same teacher a hull year since he was born; but he knowed all his letters before he was three, and could read good that same year. His father thought he was the smartest child in nine caounties." Eliza flushed when she spoke of her husband, and a tone of sweetness crept into her voice, and Naomi heard it with a strange pang.

"How many have you got in all, Elizy?"

"Eight above the sod and two below."

"How old was they when you lost 'em, sister?"

"My second twins? They died when they was born."

A shadow crossed the window.

"Here's Frederick himself," said Eliza, rising and standing, with dignity in every line of her body, as a round-shouldered man, with a growth of stubbly beard, came into the room.

"Husband, here's Naomye."

"Good-day, marm."

He no longer threw his head back, and looked through slits in his eyelids. He showed many a trace of hard work and poverty. The manliness in him had thriven on these hardships, and like a growing tree, had crowded out the weeds of his youth—so Naomi thought, as she looked at him respectfully.

"I put the mare in your brother's barn, marm. *She* wun't teach any tricks to the colts aout there. She's as saound as a trigger. You could water

that mare with apple-jack, and she'd show ye no tricks, neither in stall nor in harness."

Naomi could not think of any reply to make to this, so she looked out the window in the vain hope of seeing Budsey and Marm returning across lots in the buckboard.

"Your brother hain't to home, I p'sume?" asked Eliza's husband. "I was goin' to ask him if he'd trade any of his nags for that mare."

"He hain't here now, but I expect him and Marm both hum by supper-time. You'll stay all night, wun't ye? I'll make up the spare chamber——"

"Why, thanky, marm——" Mr. Dukes was beginning, when Eliza cut across with:

"No—no, Frederick—we must be gitting back to the childern."

"Oh, Elizy, I do want to have you see Budsey, how he's growed! and Marm 'll have a tantrum if she finds you've be'n here while she was away——"

"We'll come again, and fetch up little Jim and Sim, and little Poll and Mag, to show ye."

"Wal, let me go find some of the shrub and raspberry vinegar for ye; and you must take a quarter of beef if you've got room for it, and a firkin of cider jell."

When they had drunk the shrub and vinegar, and eaten some rich stale cake, Naomi took them out to show the new ashery, the plum trees, new hencoops, and reaping rake. They looked over the pigs, calves, and hens. They tasted the crude potash in the tumble-kettle, and looked at the beginnings of Budsey's sawmill. But when Frederick Dukes was gone to hitch up his gentle mare with her many-times-pieced and knotted harness, Eliza fell into one or two long reveries. Naomi furtively studied her sister's old face, bent spine, and crooked, toiling gait.

"Is she dreaming of her young days, when she was so pretty and so frivolous, so high-strung and

haughty?" wondered Naomi as she took these sidelong gazes. "Doos she wish she could choose again, and choose to stay in a cheerful farmhouse, where there was a plenty of everything? Or else wed with some respected man and good purvider, such as my . . . such as Mr. Tibbald? I don't know if I darest to ask her! I don't know what she might say—I don't scarcely know what I *wish* she'd say! Elizy?"

The dreamer turned, with a slight start.

"What was you thinkin' of?"

"Something I hain't told you about yet."

"Can't you tell me?"

"Oh, yes. It's my little innocent."

"Have you got such a child, Elizy? Is it a boy or a girl?"

"It's a little boy. His father and I think a great deal about him, what's to become of him in the years to come. But the Lord 'll provide."

"How old is he? Have you christened him?"

"Oh, yes. His name's Alferd. He's four years old this May."

Naomi forgot her question in a sudden desire to see the unintelligent plaintive face which Eliza's few words had painted on her imagination. She could not tell why, but she "craved after him." She asked Eliza many questions. What colour were Alfred's eyes? Was he strong or delicate? Did he play about, or moon and dream? Whether he talked? Whether he was taken to church? Whether his brothers and sisters were kind to him? and did he know the Lord's Prayer, or any little hymn?

Eliza said his eyes were pale, like an albino's; he was thin and delicate, with a bluish leaden skin; he played wildly by fits and starts, and then it was hard to catch him; he spoke a few words, and babbled a great many; he could not learn the Lord's Prayer, or to count, or to tell his letters; yes, his brothers and sisters were very good with him.

"There air those, Naomye, that think such childern air sent as a punishment to their fathers and mothers; but Alfy's not a punishment to Frederick and me. Instead of vexation we take a kind of comfort in him—but I don't believe I could explain to ye the curious kind of comfort 'tis," she ended wistfully.

Long-forgotten scenes had returned to Naomi's mind at that word "punishment." She thought of the paper Eliza had left for their father, and of how Marm had said, "Your shister hain't be'n a good girl."

"Elizy," said Naomi, "you left a little paper for father when you—when you——"

"I b'lieve I did, my dear."

"I was never allowed to read it, and I've often wondered what it said."

"Never allowed to—what do you mean, Naomye?"

"Why—why, nothing, only that father was so

choice of it, and set so much store by it, and all—don't cry, Elizy!"

"You frightened me so, Naomye! I thought you meant—I thought you meant that father thought I——"

"Oh, no! no! Father was comforted by that paper, and set the most store by it of anything he had," said Naomi, falsifying like a good sister.

"All I said in it was that I did grieve to be bringing disgrace on him, for I had a longing to comfort him, and I knowed how saour and sulky I'd be'n all that winter," said Eliza, drying her eyes. They had turned back toward the house, and could see the gentle (not too gentle) mare being persuaded into the thills of the worn buckboard. Naomi saw the time growing short in which, if ever, she was to ask her question. A great deal suddenly seemed to hang on it. Budsey had not taken her part; but what if Eliza should have come now to her rescue? A great thrill, a taste of freedom, ran through her calm

body. Eliza perhaps had been sent here by those Powers in whom Naomi believed—"like the Daughter of Jerusalem," said Naomi to herself, "that brought good tidings up the high mountain."—What a clatter this was in her side! Aloud she said:

"Elizy!"

"What say, sister?"

"Will you answer me a question true blue, and not be angry with me for asking it? It hain't a matter of curiosity—it's very important to me."

"Ask it," replied Eliza, giving her a full look.

("This curious beating in my side," thought Naomi, "must be the tremor cordis.")

"In your heart and soul, Elizy, air you glad you fled away with Frederick Dukes? or would you take your life back and stay to home? Be sure you speak the truth! the hull, plain truth!"

"Take my life back, sister? Oh, no! I never saw the woman I'd change my lot with; neither in Maine; nor in York; nor in the Green Moun-

t'ins. There's a kind of happiness that's worth the price I've paid for it, and a great sight more; and it's my hope, little sister, that, old as you be, you may have it yet, for it's far above rubies. You better wait for it, Naomye. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but as the Good Book says, All for love and the world well lost."

Naomi took up her sister's stubbed and knotty hand. She was trembling all over.

"Good-bye, Mr. Tibbald," she muttered.

"What say, Naomye?"

"I say I've be'n through the fire, and through the water, and you've brought me out into a wealthy place."

CHAPTER XVI

The Proud Summer Ends

WHEN Naomi awoke on the morning after Eliza's visit, the blue-jays were chattering in the poplar tops, and a sprinkle of yellow leaves blew in the window, and made a sunshine on the floor before the sun was up.

"What makes me feel this lightness in my head? Oh, yes, I recollect! I recollect! Elizy was here yistaday."

She stopped, transfixed, with her face half washed.

"I recollect what she said to me about that matter of true love. How those blue-jays twitter! Twitter away, little jays! I feel as young, and free, and spry as any of ye."

She paused a full five minutes over her shoes and stockings.

"I'm most afeared I shall hop and prance on the way to church. Elizy, this is your doin's. You let me out of the cage."

" 'True love,' said she, 'is wuth a large price.' And then she said, 'P'haps you, sister, old as you be, may have it yet.' Here! I must dress me quicker than this. This is Budsey's appearin'-out day."

There was enough to do to make any young woman hasten with her dressing. All the Lucys were coming to dinner, and yet all the Polkes must be in church to see the betrothed ones enter arm in arm, and sit down solemnly in one pew in the eyes of the congregation. Naomi had not only herself to dress, when her work was done; but she must help Marm into her bursting tight beaded waist and long mantilla; and she meant to fetch Budsey a brown lily for his buttonhole, if she could find time to run to the swamp.

Naomi herself was to wear her rainbow stockings and silver comb. Her old blue dress was

still her best, but she had a pair of crocheted mitts, and a green flower in her silvery poke.

As she came into church, Mr. Tibbald looked at her with kindling eyes. She looked very young, very spruce and cheerful, in all her best garments. How well the green flower became her chestnut hair!

Mr. Tibbald had often felt like this before, especially in his solitary lodging, where the stuffed owl sat on the head of his bed, and his melancholy fiddle hung on the wall. He was accustomed to these waves of longing for a small creature in petticoats behind his teapot, or beside his studious chair. But it was almost always by lamplight that he felt such pangs, which the broad light of day generally dissipated, as it raised the value of his comfortable bachelorhood in his eyes. And yet he knew that the waves of longing were a rising tide, and he was content to feel that swell, and to be carried out of his haven in the fulness of time.

Now in the bright light of morning, and in all this concourse of people, he felt all his pangs and longings coming upon him in a flood. Where was his customary nervousness? What made him feel himself another man, one who would never again tremble on lonely roads, or behind side-stepping horses? That red-chestnut head, those silken soft grey eyes, sweet hollows in amber-freckled cheeks. . . . Was it possible that the tide had risen to the full, and was bearing him out of his haven?

Here were the appearers-out. Cass, in a striped mantle and large pink bonnet, hung on Budsey's arm. Budsey's purple-faced suit became his figure and proud, darkly sunburnt face. He carried himself with an excellent lordly air. Mr. Tibbald drew several deep breaths as the Psalm began:

"Sing we merrily unto God our strength, make a cheerful noise unto the God of Jacob:

"Take the psalm, bring hither the tabret, the merry harp with the lute.

"Blow up the trumpet in the new moon."

"Before another new moon," thought Mr. Tibbald solemnly, "I may have appeared out with Mrs. Naomye."

And when he went up to his lady's door that evening, he had only one fleeting cold fear, as he seemed to behold her, in a glass, retiring smoothly on the billowing wave of her courtesy. But in that instant he thrust his nails into his palm until they drew a little of his pale blood.

"Come out, Mrs. Naomye, and set on the bench under the popple tree."

"I'm afeared it's blowing up a shower."

"If it doos, I can purtect you."

What solemn tones were these?

"Wal, then, I'll find me a shawl."

They sat down on the bench, and Mr. Tibbald began as he had resolved to do.

"I've fetched a new ballad to larn you, Mrs. Naomye."

"Oh, I'm all agog to hear it!"

"I'll speak the first line, and see what you think of it."

Again that solemn tone!

Naomi said, "I hope it's as pretty as 'Barbry Allen.'"

"I—I think it's far away prettier."

"Wal, hasten and let me hear it."

How fast his waistcoat rose and fell!

"My Deare——My Deare——"

"If you've forgot it, never mind, Mr. Tibbald."

"I hain't forgot it.

"My Deare and Only Love."

Mr. Tibbald stopped here; and he thought his lady could have heard his loudly hammering heart; but she was trembling worse than he.

"Wh-what do you think of that line, Mrs. . . . Mrs.——"

("Oh!" thought Naomi, "he cannot speak my name!")

"I think I would better be dead, Mr. Tibbald."

"Don't say that, Mrs. Naomye!"

"I do—I do wish so, Mr. Tibbald! I see now what a wicked woman I be. I should be struck deef or blind for this—you never can forgive me."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Naomye?"

"I mean that I'm one o' those hateful women—hussies—minxes—cats—that let a gentleman come to visit them and teach them pretty ballads, and all the time they don't—don't feel *that way*—they're proud, they're pleased, but they don't feel to—to—to love that gentleman the smallest bit."

After a dreadful pause, Mr. Tibbald said in a sort of frozen voice:

"I've heared of such women, but that you was one of that kind I never would believe. Wal, I've be'n deceived and played with, and that's the

end of it. Enough said—I hope no other man'll ever——"

"Mr. Tibbald!"

"Leave go my coat!"

"Mr. Tibbald, I hain't one of that kind that deceive and play with a person! I never deceived you—I never took your stuffed owl, though you offered it to me twice! I never accepted any token from you!"

"I bid you good-night, Mrs. Naomye."

"You're very angry with me, and all because I couldn't think of any maidenly way to tell you I didn't love you before you asked me."

Mr. Tibbald stopped, as these words pierced through his wounded pride like a rapier.

"How could I help this coming to pass, Mr. Tibbald?"

"You never w-wanted to help it! You were content if you could bring me to these straits. W-wal, enough said. I p'sume I'm not the only man you've served so. Go on, do, and tell your

old Marm all about it, what a figure I cut, and all, and laugh about it, both of ye! You needn't to wait any longer than till I get as far away as the Temples' barn."

"Hush, Mr. Tibbald! Marm Patridge wun't laugh at this—she'll be very sorry and cross. Budsey 'll be sorry too, and my aunt Darby 'll scold me—she'll scold me for choosing to be an old maid. I shall be one! I shall grow peevish, and stingy, and spiteful—the childern in the streets 'll holler at me. And that's because I wun't tell you what's false, and cheat both of us out of the best thing in life——"

The purple anger all ebbed away from Mr. Tibbald's face as Naomi's voice broke on these words. He felt a great shame and tenderness in his heart. He turned back, and lifted up the little locket on Naomi's neck, and kissed it. Had he loved her before, he wondered? for he loved her much more now that he had forgiven her.

"Naomye—Mrs. Naomye—if a man should be

content to wait a long while—a matter of months, or a year—wouldn't there be a chance for him? He hasn't, p'haps, behaved quite as a gentleman should, this evening. But that was because it was p-pretty hard for him——"

Naomi shook her head.

"I would say so, Mr. Tibbald—I would say there was a chance for a man, that *I* call an excellent gentleman, if I could feel even the smallest feeling for him, like a tiny little breath of wind—but no! I'm like a tree with not a leaf stirring."

"This world is pretty hard for a man——"

"Oh! Can you forgive me, Mr. Tibbald?"

"Call me Henry once, if you can."

"Henry, if I could help you to forget this, and to find some other, better woman!"

"I shall be a bachelor to the end of my days, Mrs. Naomye."

CHAPTER XVII

The Little Innocent

Who taught this pleading to unpractised eyes?

THE harvest moon, it seemed to Naomi, would never wane. On night after night it waked her up with its silver patterns on the curtains and the ceiling beams, and made her sit up and look out at the winking world. Then began the long hours of self-reproach of which she knew the ache and burn so well——

"How could I draw Mr. Tibbald into all this trouble? Oh, I wish, I wish I had it to do over again! How much sooner would I be rude and unmaidenlike! How much sooner would I have throwed all his comfits on the floor, that night of the spell! Then I would have been hateful for an hour; but now I've pushed him into a pit of misery for years and years!

"I wish he could be cured of loving me. But said he, 'I shall be a bachelor to the end of my days.' I'm sure Mace Paouncet was twice betrothed, but I s'pose he wasn't a true lover. Mr. Tibbald hain't so fickle as Mace. I wish he could cast an eye on Emily Byjam, or Sarey Paouncet. They're both prettier and smarter than I be, according to what most folks think. But no! that hain't the way. True lovers air inconsolable. 'I shall be a bachelor all my days,' said he. I deserve to lie awake and cry this hull night through. I'm one of those hateful women that I've heared about and hated, in ballads and books. Yes! I'm like one of those callous, painted, brazen women."

Her pillow was wet with weeping, and what with self-reproach, and the disappointed looks of her elders, she grew to have a drooping carriage, in spite of Marm's quoting a thousand times:

> "Up with your head, and up with your chin,
> Toes turned out, and heels turned in."

Budsey and Cass were married in the third week of December. They had a very fine wedding; the church was lined with young spruces, and a hundred ropes of ground pine festooned the ceiling. Everybody in Beartown came and danced and feasted in the small Lucy house. Eliza and Frederick Dukes, with their little girls, came, and Nabby and her husband brought all their children, down to the babe of seven months. Naomi danced a reel of eight with William Byjam, and a Betty Martin with old Mr. Greenpiece himself. She could not mope on Budsey's wedding day, even when she saw Mr. Tibbald meandering alone in the porch with his sad, roving eye. But was it quite so sad and roving in these days? or did Time drop his honey balm even into the wounds of true lovers?

In spite of Naomi's dark deservings, the winter began to brighten all about her. Budsey and Cass went away to Albany on their wedding trip, and were gone for two weeks. When they came

back, Mrs. Darby had a great dancing party for them at the tollgate. Mrs. Lucy, not to be outdone, hired the Temples' large barn for another. The Byjams gave a monstrous musical party. Naomi, though not a belle, was a considered person at all these doings. She was never left to sit out more than three dances in succession.

After all her sorrowful autumn nights, this winter was the shortest she had ever known. It burst into a fine early spring. Hepaticas were out in March, and adder-tongues in early April. The green film spread in a week's time halfway up Bald Mountain, from the blackberry thickets at the foot to the fern-overgrown landslide.

Naomi was planting lettuce and radishes one afternoon, on a slope overlooking the tiny green-specked gardens of Westminster, when a wordless melody began running in her head and demanding a garment of poetry. She was accustomed to these wild-goose chases on which her mind *would* run off in spite of her, interrupting

all her good practical work. She was spilling the lettuce seed into the radish row while the melody poked about in her brain for its lines and verses, and a delicious, faint, burning smell rose up from the bonfires of Westminster.

"Here—here! What be I doing? I've forgot which bag is radishes and which is sallet.

"I see the smoke rise up to Heaven
Across Jamaica valley——

Tut, tut! I'm out here to plant this sauce-gardin, not to be cappin' verses. What would Budsey think of me? But if I could just think of a rhyme for 'heaven' and another for 'valley'——

"I see the smoky steeples rise
Along Jamaica valley:
I hear the cow-bells down the pike,
Co' boss, Whitefoot and Sally."

It was while she sat, with half-shut eyes, on the damp earth, composing this beautiful lyric, that a small boy on horseback came plodding up the mountain. He was white round the lips and nose with fatigue, with fear, and with strangeness. He

had never ridden this road before. He did not look more than eleven years old. When he saw the woman in the clean calico sitting under the bush, he dismounted, and tied his horse to one of the poplars.

"Doos my uncle Saul Polke live here?" he asked.

"Yis, this is his haouse, the sightliest place in taown. But he's away, and your aunt Cass too, over the mount'in. And your great-aunt Marm's gone to the tollgate. Whose child be you, little man? If Saul Polke's your uncle, I must be your aunt Naomye. Air you Josiph's child? You hain't Charles's, for he's in the West."

"I'm Frederick Dukes's son—my name's Sim. Oh, what a ride I've had! I was lost and astray a-many times. I guess you're the one my mother's bellering after. She's so sick, in such pain as I never saw her before. The horse kicked her in the head, father's new spavined one, that he was goin' to trade in Tempe this very day; it

kicked her over the ear, and made her crazy for a spell. I'm all sore with ridin' so fur—oh, haow my legs dŏ ache!" He began to cry with hunger, fatigue, and strangeness, despite his evident efforts to be manly.

Naomi fed and rested her nephew, while she gave orders to the new, green hired man, and left messages for Marm and Budsey. Then she mounted the rawboned horse her young escort had ridden, and clasped him round the waist, with rather a faint heart. For such a fearless tomboy child, Naomi had grown into a somewhat timid woman, as her old-maidhood told on her, bit by bit, year by year. She clung to the little boy as darkness came on and the woods looked so illimitably black.

"This horse has got a shoe loose, little nevew, I feel sure," she kept crying, and what with her clinging and her fears, she made the little boy very manly and almost a braggart. Showing weakness oneself is the best way in the world to

bolster up the coward heart. Aunt and nephew were very good friends indeed by the time they reached the poor unpainted house, on the outskirts of Westminster, where Eliza dwelt.

In the kitchen bedroom, on a battered bedstead, lay the careworn woman who had once been the delicate, spoilt Eliza. Her eyes rested on Naomi without recognising her. Her head was bound with wet cloths, and the room, with its closed window, smelt of vinegar. The scared, neglected children peered in the door and scurried away when they saw the stranger. If some were bold enough to twitch little Sim by the coat-tails, he looked round and rebuked them, and they fled away over the creaking floors like visionary children, Naomi thought.

She drew the bedclothes up smoothly, opened the window and let in the sweet smell of the damp maple bark, brought water from the cistern and washed Eliza's face and hands, and braided her hair. Eliza lifted herself and gazed at her sister

with puzzled looks. At length she recognised Naomi, and weakly laughed with pleasure to think she had come. "Wal, Naomye, here you be —you've come, hain't you?" was all she could say for some time. Naomi held her hand, and tried not to look sorry or sad. After a considerable time, Eliza with an effort began:

"Naomye, I had little Sim—had him go after you, to ask you something. . . . It's a great deal for one sister to ask of another, but you've got such a good home—so much to do with—and you know you offered Frederick and me your haouse on the north pike that father left ye——"

"And you can have it now, Elizy, whenever you're ready to move in——"

"No—no—it hain't the house. What was I saying? I've forgot it, I'm afeared. I've forgot it, after all, Naomye!" she ended plaintively.

"I promise I will do it, whatever 'tis you want of me, Elizy."

"When I'm dead and gone, sister."

"Oh, no, sister! when you're alive and well."

"Wal, but what is it I want you should do?"

"Rest you a minute: you'll think of it. Here we be together; everything's all right. I'll see to the house and the childern; was that what you wanted to say?"

"No, it wan't . . . that. What . . . was it?" asked Eliza dreamily.

"Never you mind what 'twas, poor darling! Can you git a little sleep, do you think? You'll be the better for it."

"I can't think what 'tis I wanted to say!"

"Never mind, then."

"Oh, I can't think—I can't . . . tell ye!"

"Wal, wal, my dear, go to sleep, then; by and by you'll remember it."

"By and by," repeated Eliza contentedly, shutting her eyes. Next moment a faint scream was heard outside, and a strange little wizened creature ran into the room and made for its

mother. Eliza raised herself; a look of beauty came over her face; she opened her arms to the little one.

Naomi thought she comprehended then what it was that Eliza wanted of her. She touched her sister's coarse sleeve.

"Little Alferd 'll come to his aunt Naomye," she said cheerfully. "Come, little Alferd."

The child clung to Eliza, but Naomi gently pulled him free, and took him on her own lap. Holding him close, she said:

"Elizy, look at me. What do you see?"

"I see my sister Naomye, with Alferd in her lap."

"You do so, Elizy. Now tell me what you hear.—Little Alferd, I crave to have you for my own child. I'll keep you, and purtect you, and try to make you a good child and a happy one, as long as I live. Did you hear, Elizy?"

"I heared my sister Naomye—I heared her say—I heared her promise to love and keep my

little Alferd, so I guess . . . guess I needn't try any more to think what I was goin' to say . . . Naomye has said it for me."

"Go to sleep and rest you, then, Elizy. It's dark outdoors; you're sleepy. The crickets make you sleepy with their singin'. I'll see to all the childern. Come, little Alferd; your mother's all drowsy and quiet; her pillow's cool; she's going to take a long rest. Sweet dreams, Elizy!"

Her words made Eliza drowsy, for her mind was in that weakened hypnotic state when suggestion acts upon it easily. What sweet dreams she had in this her last sleep! for she smiled again and again, almost as if she heard the "pretty gallops" at that husking long ago, when she had first met her husband. When Frederick Dukes came home with the doctor, his wife was scarcely breathing. Her eyes were shut, her hands clasped over her breast, and she had only one more journey to take over the rough roads of the Green Mountains.

When the small funeral, to which Saul and Cass came down, was over, Frederick Dukes took his orphans back to his old parents in Charlotte County—all but little Alfred. The innocent went by stage, with his aunt Naomi, up Bald Mountain. His thin, triangular face, blinking pink eyes, his old, shrewd, and yet simple look, his bursts of rapid babble, interspersed with actual words—in short, the whole maimed and lacking personality of the child—appealed deeply to the primeval woman in Naomi. His perfect helplessness, so pitiable to see, made her exult to think that he was all her own—hers and hers only.

"Here we be—I'll lift him down, thanky, Mr. Byjam," said Naomi as the stage stopped in front of the poplars. It was not until this moment, when Cass looked out of the window, that any fear as to the child's welcome crossed her mind.

"Is this Elizy's innocent child, Naomye?" asked Cass as she opened the door; and it seemed

to Naomi that she felt a cold wind blow out from her brother's house.

"Yes, this is little Alferd."

Cass shuddered a little.

"You don't intend to keep him here but a few days, I p'sume, until his father gets settled and comes for him?"

"Why, yes, Cass—I did—I do—I promised Elizy I'd keep the child."

The shadow deepened on Mrs. Budsey's fair long face. Her apple-blossom cheeks turned pinker.

"Wal . . . bring him in."

It was the first time she had spoken shortly to her sister-in-law; and Naomi shrank a little, and said to herself, "Budsey's honeymoon is over." She did not realise yet what she had done, in darkening Cass's bright bridal house.

They all went in together. Marm was sitting on the tipping settle behind the table. When she saw Alfred, she first started, and then winked,

and shook her head, and nodded hard at Naomi, pointing with her thumb over her shoulder toward Cass. But Naomi did not see. Her eyes were fixed on Budsey, while she took off, with trembling fingers, Alfred's rusty coat and antediluvian hood. The child stood displayed in all his blankness and poverty of look, before his elders.

Budsey crossed to his wife's side, and pulled her shawl up round her shoulders. He looked very much perplexed; and as Naomi beheld that troubled frown, all the tendernesses of twenty-five years flowed over her heart, and entirely engulfed her new affection. Should she make Budsey trouble?—then she saw that she herself had ended his honeymoon.

"Brother, I'll go down to Mr. Martin Paouncet's to-morrow forenoon, and hire us a room over his shop," she said in a voice full of tears. "I can afford that, I guess."

"Foolishness, Naomye."

"I'm very sorry I fetched up little Alfred—I didn't think——"

"Foolishness, I tell ye!"

Budsey's "foolishness" was the most comforting word ever spoken, Naomi thought.

"Put the little toad to bed, sister, and then we'll talk it over," said Budsey. "You see, Naomye—you see——" Something in his tone made Naomi look at her sister-in-law. Was Cass very tired? or why did she lean on Budsey's arm, and give that little, childish sigh?

Marm gave Naomi's sleeve a sharp pull, and whispered:

"You're ash blind ash a bat, Naomye Polke! Wal, you needn't to cry about it. We'll take the little toad, you and I will, up to your haoush, that your father left you, on the north turnpike, and thar we'll live together, the three of ush."

CHAPTER XVIII

Morning, Afternoon, and Evening at the House on the North Turnpike

Where lies the land to which the ship would go?
Far, far ahead, is all her seamen know.
And where the land she travels from? Away,
Far, far behind, is all that they can say.

"SEE, little Alf, the Paouncet boys and girls all ploddin' away to school. There's Matthew drawin' little Marthy in her wagon—away they all go, to say their lessons—and doosn't Alfy want to say his lessons too?"

Naomi sat on the doorstep of her saltbox house on the north turnpike. She had her young nephew in her lap. Three years had not changed the little boy much, though he stood several inches taller in his quaint homemade pantaloons. His face was still a bluish, leaden colour. He still babbled many more words than he spoke plainly.

But there was a sort of background in his pale shallow eyes of late, as if some brighter light were shining into them.

"Pictures, Alfey. See the pictures," his aunt went on. "Doosn't Alfey want to read what it says with the pictures?" She showed a print of little Samuel, in a well-starched Colonial night-gown.

Alfred began to pull at his dickey, with a questioning look.

"No, no, Alfey! Keep on your dickey and pinafore. It hain't bedtime, though little Samuel's got his nightgown on. Aunt wants you should larn your letters. Look, here they be. A, B, C. You larned those three yesterday. Don't you recollect 'em?"

Babble, babble, babble.

"A, little man. Say A. Look at aunt's mouth. A."

The little man laid a finger on his aunt's tongue and said "Pill."

"No, Alferd. Aunt's very well, needs no pills. Open your own mouth. Now! say A."

The steady light pouring from those patient, warm grey eyes into Alfred's poor pale ones, seemed at length to kindle a spark there, and he cried suddenly:

"A!"

"Good! Good boy. He shall have a string of spools to play with. Now here's A on the paper. Look at it well. You write A now for Aunt. Good! Now B . . . Now C."

How drawn and studious was Alfred's face, as with his tongue hanging out, and his hollow cheeks sucked in, he scrawled his three letters on the paper!

Naomi smiled a bright smile of triumph.

"There! He's recomembered his hull week's lesson! Now I'll teach him D, if it takes me an hour."

She began again patiently.

"D, little Alferd. A, B, C, D. Look at aunt's

mouth, see how she pushes her tongue against her teeth. D! D!"

"Tea! Tea!" cried Alfred, hopping up and down.

"Oh, no, Alfey, it hain't tea time. Here! where's the child gone? Alfey! Alfey!" She ran after him, where his whitish mane bobbed among the willows in the waste meadows of the glebe land. She was fleet and well-winded, but she could not catch her little wild boy. As she called "Alf! Alf!" it sounded like "Elf! Elf!" and he darted like an elf, or a firefly, in and out of the orange willows and berry thickets of the glebe.

"I wun't be discouraged," said Naomi to herself, but winking back a few tears. "He's larned three letters, and he knows part of his 'Now I lay me.' How hard I worked to teach him that! But I've never slapped his hands, though I eenamost thought it was my duty to when he stole that hen of Mrs. Byjam's."

She went into the house and sat down with her

sewing. Her face had grown longer and thinner in these years. The freckles were fading away from her cheeks, where the delicate hollows had deepened. These three years had been full of pleasant and not unrewarded toil, which yet left her with some odds and ends of longing unfulfilled. Sometimes she had a foolish craving to snatch back her disappearing youth; and then she called herself peevish, and drank a cup of bitter boneset, or weeded in her sauce-garden, to "sun and sweeten" herself.

But she could not read poetry any more. It was too poignant, and made her more wakeful than the moonlight had used to do. "Those pretty ballads belong to the young," said Naomi, not knowing that when her youth was really past, these cravings and longings would be all at rest. She did not know how youthful a quality it is which makes music and poetry too sharply sweet.

She was twenty-eight years old, and thought herself a middle-aged woman. All her former

playmates were long since married. Isabella Byjam and Fanny Pouncet were not only married, but wore caps, which indeed became them very well. They had their babies, and so had Debbe Darby, who had married the fat Mace. Mr. Tibbald had begun, some time before, a cautious courtship of a widow in Westminster. Naomi had always thought that such news as this would make her very glad; but she was ashamed to find, on hearing of it, that she felt lonely and a little forlorn.

"I must get over this," she said to herself. "It hain't reasonable in me. It's a good thing for Henry Tibbald that he can be consoled. I'm surprised to feel as I do, and yet it hain't the first time I've found myself a different woman from what I thought I was."

It was not the first, nor was it to be the last time.

But now as she sat over her sewing, Naomi began to philosophise about her little boy.

"He's like one of the shad trees father used to fetch home from the Red Woods, and try to graft a branch of gardin plums on it. I'm very like father, in more ways than one, I find as I grow older. Father used to talk to himself, and we childern thought haow curious it was; and now here I be talking to myself, and sewin' in poor little Alfey's sleeve wrong side foremost. There's nobody to say to me 'Come down out of the clouds, Naomye!' since poor Marm was taken."

She turned her chair so that she could see a sagging slate headstone under a lilac bush at the foot of her small orchard.

"Marm's earned a pleasant rest and sleep. Doos she dream, I wonder, or is she alive again in some of the stars, p'haps?—I think more likely she's here on the face of the earth, in some far country. This doctrine of angels flying along gold and silver streets doosn't seem natural, and I never could get to believe it. Wherever Marm is, I wish I could have a little short talk with her.

I wish I could say, 'I wasn't very mindful of you, Marm, when you was here, but I think about it considerable in these days.'

"I recomember when Deb Darby first had a husk-dolly with teeth, haow I cried, and Marm laid down her bunnit that she was trimmin', and set some barley kernils into my husk-dolly's maouth. . . . If she was here now, I'd thank her for that, and a few other things she did for Budsey and Elizy and me, I guess . . . but it's too late now, Marm Patridge!

"Why, what's Alfey going into the shed for? He's got hold of the hoe—he's carryin' it aout to the cistern! He's got a string, and tied it to the handle. Oh! oh! I believe—I believe he's trying to fish!"

Naomi sprang up, dropping all her spools on the floor.

"He's trying to fish! He's trying to fish! His mind's beginning to wake up! He's larning from the other boys he sees a-fishing in the

Branch. Oh, my dear little Alferd, I'll take you down the Branch, in your uncle Budsey's west meadow, this very afternoon!"

At about two o'clock that afternoon, Mrs. Budsey Polke, going out in bonnet and mitts to pay ceremonious visits, met Mrs. Naomi and Alfred walking southward from their saltbox house. Alfred carried a willow pole, with a cotton cord fastened into the end of it with a staple, in one hand; and in the other a box of buttercup heads. Mrs. Naomi wore her short calico and stogiest boots, for the west meadow was rich and boggy.

"Where you off to, sister Naomye?" asked Mrs. Budsey. Cassandra had matured into a very handsome woman. Her long apple-blossom face, sweet smiling mouth, dark eyes, and glossy hair curtained over her ears, were all in the prime of their beauty. She was, as usual, tagged afar off by a spindling child of three, her little Jess, whose shock of dark straight hair, long spine, and slender legs, were the exact copy of Cassandra

in the days when she had slept in the sap-kettle. Naomi had a peculiar fondness for little Jess. Not all because she was Budsey's eldest, nor all because she was a clean, clever child; but chiefly because she was little and childish enough to play with poor Alfey. So many times had Naomi stood by the window watching her poor darling hovering like a gnome on the edge of the other children's games—hovering, and trying to understand!

"Where air you going, Naomye?" repeated her sister-in-law.

"Why, Cass, what do you think? Alfey wants to go fishin'! I catched him this forenoon tyin' a string to the hoe, and anglin' after minnies in the cistern! What do you think of that, hey?"

"Why, that's very encouraging to ye, hain't it? Where you goin'—down the west meadow, where his uncle Budsey can keep an eye on him?"

"That's where we've set out for. Oh, Cass, think of Alfey fishin' like other boys!" cried Na-

omi, her bosom swelling. "But I shall have him use these buttercups and squash-blossoms for bait —I wouldn't have him stick a pin through a live worm for any sakes."

"Traouts wun't bite at a buttercup, Naomye!"

"I don't see why they wun't. A yallow flower makes a very bright spot in the water."

"Why, Naomye, you'll only make the child ridiculous, larning him to fish with a buttercup and a squash-blossom!"

"Wal—he better be ridiculous, than to harden his heart."

"You're a curious creature, Naomye."

"I guess I be, and I don't know as I care," cried Naomi, with a wave of very warm colour in her cheeks. "I hain't going to bring up my little boy to hurt and maim every little creeter he can catch!"

"Wal, wal, sister! Please yourself!"

Budsey was hilling corn in his large westward field. He looked down the daisied meadow and

saw Naomi, in her old short green calico and brown sunbonnet, wandering along the stream with little Alfred. She was baiting his pinhook with a yellow flower, and throwing it out into the rapids of the tiny stream.

Budsey called across the corn to his Irish farmhand:

"Hi, John Michaelfergus! look here!"

The other ceased hoeing, and came where he too could see the fishers.

"What do you think of that, John?"

The farmhand looked in silence. His well-tanned face quivered a little, but he did not quite laugh. He leaned on his hoe and considered the pair. Naomi's white ankles twinkled along the stream, but he could not see her face.

"Hi, John! The little feller's got one!" cried Budsey, slapping the Irishman's shoulder. "Look at him! See him jump! It's all he can do to keep inside of his skin! That's the first traout he ever catched—woman alive, what is my sister

doing? Did you see that, John? *She took that traout and throwed it back in the water!*"

"Sure I saw," replied the farmhand slowly. A small smile played round his excellent mouth, but his eyes were soft and grave. He seemed to have forgotten his work. He leaned on his hoe, watching Mrs. Naomi's white ankles and blowing green skirts.

"My sister Naomye was always one of that kind," continued Budsey. "She'd let the mice aout of the tail-trap if Marm didn't watch her. Once she tipped a hull bottle of my bait over into the grass, and when I gathered 'em all up again, she 'most had a tantrum over it."

The farmhand looked in silence at the merciful lady and her innocent boy; and it seemed to him that they were surrounded by a ring of the little "Good People" of Ireland.

"John Michaelfergus is very silent of late," mused Budsey. "I hain't knowed him to be so silent and serious since his first Sunday in Bear-

taown, when I catched him crying for his old country. Perhaps he thinks more of his empty pockets now than he did at that time. I recollect how he danced all night at little Jess's christenin', when he had a year and seven months left to work off the price of his voyage."

Budsey's guess was right. John Michaelfergus was thinking of his empty pockets, which had hung so light in his worn shag coat when he left Castlemartyr. They had been light enough all these two years and more of indentured labour. He could dance his wonderful reels and clogs the better for their emptiness, he had always thought. But now they hung like millstones on each side of him.

And yet he had forgotten them again as he walked up the turnpike that evening. He walked very well, with a different gait from the men of the Green Mountains—a longer and more springing step. He was of a fair height, but not tall. His hair was black, his eyes a shining hazel. He

had picked up a squash-blossom in the west meadow; it had no stem, but he put it in the buttonhole of his grey shag coat, with the help of a wisp of grass. As he walked, he sang the lovely, plaintive song of "Shule Aroon,"—sang it very pathetically, because his heart was very light.

"I'll sell my rock, I'll sell my reel,
I'll sell my only spinning wheel,
To buy for my love a sword of steel—
Is go, d-teidhu, a muirneen slan."

He sang so heartily that he did not hear the wheels of Mr. Greenpiece's aged buggy behind him, until the feeble voice of Beartown's old minister called out:

"Which way you going, John? Wun't ye ride?"

"Sure I think Shanks's mares 'll carry me, thank your river'nce."

"Better climb in. Where air you bound for?"

"I was after walking a small piece up the pike."

"Wal, I set forth in that direction too. I was

a-going up to see Mrs. Naomye and that little boy of hers, if she hadn't put him to bed yet."

"Indade."

"Mrs. Naomye wants I should larn the poor child the Lord's Prayer," continued Mr. Greenpiece. "I've been up there several times, but I can't see that the child makes any progress."

"Sure I'm sorry from my boots up to hear that."

"Yes, it's considerable of a disappointment to his auntie. And now I doubt—I doubt she's got another trouble in store, though most would look upon it as a blessing."

"Trouble! what trouble, your river'nce? what trouble?" asked the Irishman, taking hold of the spokes of Mr. Greenpiece's wheel, and looking with cloudy eyes at the minister.

"Why, the poor little boy's not very long for this world, it appears. I had a talk with the doctor here awhile ago. These innocent childern never live very long, he tells me."

"The gossoon has the best of care."

Mr. Greenpiece shook his head.

"He's a blue-looking child. That means a weak heart."

The Irishman was silent. He had forgotten his song. He was wishing that he could keep the wind and rain away from the merciful lady.

"I must peg along," said Mr. Greenpiece. "Get ap, King George."

"I can aisily keep ahead of ould King George," said John Michaelfergus to himself.

Naomi had been putting her little boy to bed. She kept the candle burning on the dresser for a little while, for he was afraid of the dark, and she humoured him in it. The moon was rising over Bald Mountain, and the air was chilly with the dew.

"What a curious thing it is for a woman of my Age," mused Naomi aloud, "to feel this lightness in my heels when evening comes on! I don't know what it signifies. The other night I dreamt

I was out in the woods, and a circle of fairies came up around me, and all began to dance. I don't know what gives me such dreams! They grow more and more curious every night. Last night I dreamt I had me a white dress, with a blue sash. At my Age!"

The moon had risen above the Hollow. A barn-owl screeched close by, and Naomi started to Alfred's side; but he did not awaken.

"Alfey's so fast asleep, I can blow out his candle now, I guess," whispered Naomi. "Oh! . . . . Somebody . . . is coming in across my sauce-gardin. It hain't Mr. Greenpiece walking so fast and so fur. But I wan't expecting—Oh! little Alfey, I've got on this old green calico, and somebody . . . is coming to visit me——"

When Mr. Greenpiece, a little while later, knocked on the door of the saltbox house, no one answered him. The ginger-coloured cat peered round the corner of the portico, and Alfey's pet lamb bleated. Mr. Greenpiece strained his feeble

eyes to see up and down the turnpike, but he did not think to look over toward the Hollow, where a short and stocky lady with small white ankles was walking with a gentleman in a long grey coat. They walked hand in hand, like very young lovers.

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